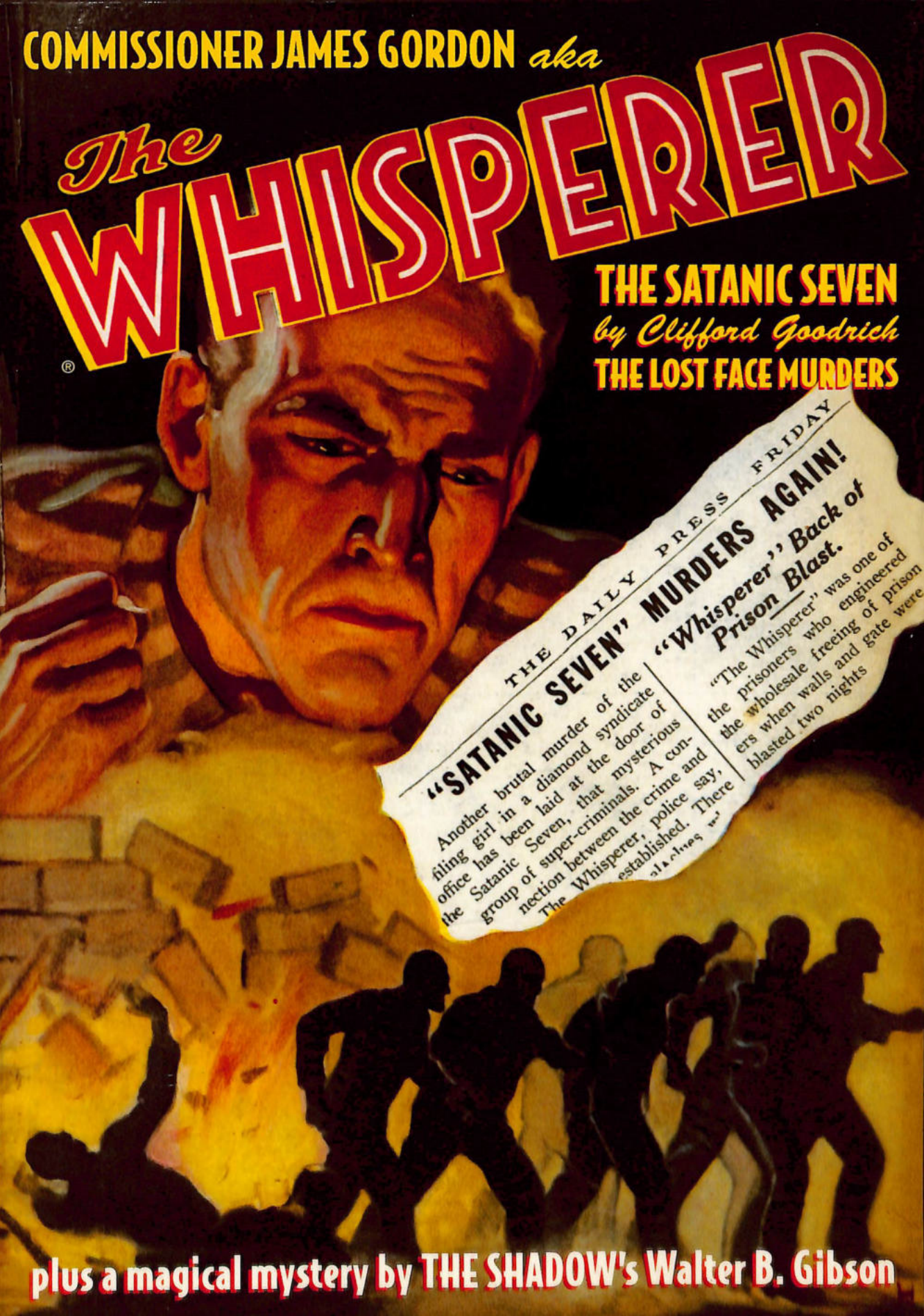
COMMISSIONER JAMES GORDON *aka*

The WHISPERER®

THE SATANIC SEVEN
by Clifford Goodrich

THE LOST FACE MURDERS



plus a magical mystery by THE SHADOW's Walter B. Gibson

The Satanic Seven *and* The Lost Face Murders

TWO HARD-BOILED ADVENTURES OF

The WHISPERER

by Laurence Donovan
writing as Clifford Goodrich

plus a Norgil magical mystery by
Walter B. Gibson and Vernon Greene

and new historical essays by
Will Murray and Anthony Tollin

SANCTUM BOOKS

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TWO AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THE GRAY WRAITH

The WHISPERER

Volume 6

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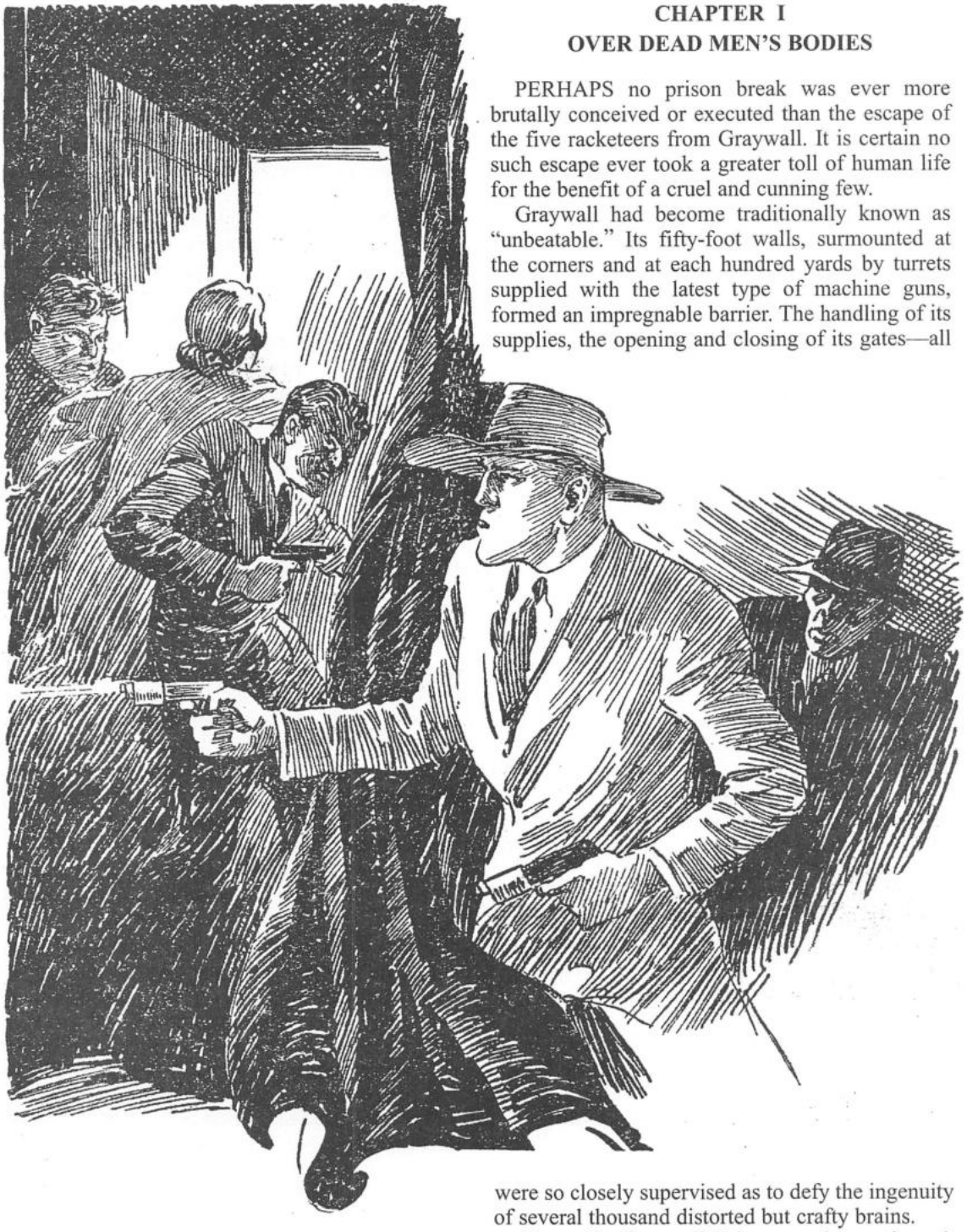
[A prison blast starts the trail to wholesale murder —a trail The Whisperer grimly follows until he comes face to face with]

The Satanic Seven

By

CLIFFORD GOODRICH



CHAPTER I
OVER DEAD MEN'S BODIES

PERHAPS no prison break was ever more brutally conceived or executed than the escape of the five racketeers from Graywall. It is certain no such escape ever took a greater toll of human life for the benefit of a cruel and cunning few.

Graywall had become traditionally known as "unbeatable." Its fifty-foot walls, surmounted at the corners and at each hundred yards by turrets supplied with the latest type of machine guns, formed an impregnable barrier. The handling of its supplies, the opening and closing of its gates—all were so closely supervised as to defy the ingenuity of several thousand distorted but crafty brains.

Alongside Graywall Prison, to the northward, was a mile-wide, treacherous river, A single railroad line touched the eastward wall. Westward and southward ran two truck highways. But all of these were far enough from the smooth, towering prison walls as to provide adequate space for cutting down men with screaming bullets.

At sunset each evening, following the supper hour in the main hall, the prisoners were conducted into the great yard surrounding the tiers of cell

A stirring, intriguing novel featuring the amazing Whisperer.

blocks for half an hour of exercise before they were locked up for the night.

Yard guards, augmented by the manned turrets, supervised this exercise. They permitted only five hundred prisoners this limited freedom at one time, giving them a breath of air.

Five hundred gray-clad men were having this liberty at the instant all hell broke loose. The timing of the break could not have been more accurately placed to be successful. The final detail of five hundred men in gray would have been formed into lines and marched to the cells in another five minutes.

The sun had dropped and it would have been difficult to distinguish convicts from guards at any distance. The prisoners could see each other's faces at only a few yards. They talked little, in their whispering voices, carefully calculated to reach only the ears for which they were intended.

ONE man, clad in the loose, gray dungarees, with a whitish blur of hair over his ears, an oddly pointed chin and eyes which seemed to have no color, was neither speaking nor seeking companionship of the others. Yet, of all the five hundred men then under the walls, his eyes and ears were perhaps the keenest.

While his fellow convicts did not know him as such, recognized him only as No. 7,555, this inconspicuous, lone figure was possibly the most notorious of all the men who had ever been admitted to the confines of Graywall. On the files in the warden's office, he was simply No. 7,555, D. Smith, burglar.

In the moment of deepening dusk, when the final gong was to be expected at any instant for forming the close lines of gray, No. 7,555 stood alone; but the colorless eyes and the slightly pointed ears buried in his white hair were suddenly alert to unusual movements.

This in itself was so slight as to be unmarked by the lounging guards in the big yards, or by the machine gunners on the walls near the turrets.

The prisoners were not making the mistake of forming into compact groups of any size. But in twos and threes, the convicts seemed to be verging slightly toward the walls near the entrance.

No. 7,555 saw this, but observed that no prisoner had crossed the "dead line" of about eighty feet from the walls, prescribed by the yard rules. It was the concerted action, accompanied by occasionally husky words, that caused No. 7,555 to become tense. His own life had depended many times upon that supersense of understanding when other men were animated by common impulse.

"Danvers told me to—"

"Toroni said don't cross the line, but that—"

"Baylor slipped us the info—"

"Be ready near the gate and—"

The brain of No. 7,555 clicked as if passing over little cogs of memory. Danvers. Toroni Baylor. Two other names flashed into the mind of No. 7.555: They were Janna and Levizo.

These five names represented the major portion of the broken racket ring that had been widely known down in the city as the Satanic Seven. The five had been inside Graywall Prison for six months. They were serving from fifty years to life, which virtually meant they would pass the remainder of their lives removed from a society to which they had become a sinister menace.

There were two others of that Satanic Seven. No. 7,555 whispered these names to himself.

"Mato and Yuli."

These two of the Satanic Seven had escaped conviction for a series of felonies and were still outside, apparently having been subdued to the status of good citizens, at least on the surface. At least this latter pair had not appeared on police records since their five companions had been sent up to the big house.

It was not strange that No. 7,555, D. Smith, burglar, should be so informed.

For No. 7,555 was The Whisperer.

The Whisperer! The amazing, supposedly ghost-like terror of the underworld, and at the same time the despair of a great police department which could neither solve his apparent crimes nor elicit from the crooks themselves so much as an adequate description for the police files.

The Whisperer? Here in Graywall Prison?

Such was No. 7,555. Though D. Smith, burglar, was entered against his number, there was no record in any court of his having been convicted. Warden Austin might have supplied some explanation for this mysterious convict, but he never would.

The mass of prisoners were now definitely moving toward the entrance gate walls. A few guards had at last become alarmed. They were beginning to move here and there, breaking up small groups, herding them toward the middle of the yard.

The names of Danvers, Baylor and Toroni came to The Whisperer several times. The Whisperer slanted his keen, colorless eyes into the mass of men. But he saw none of the three named, the three who, it appeared, must have directed many of their companions to make this concerted movement.

THE WHISPERER was still watching, listening; standing alone when a convict of such bulk of body and smallness of head as to make him appear deformed was suddenly at his side. Pale eyes narrowed down upon the smaller man the other knew only as No. 7,555.

By strange, or perhaps deliberate circumstance, these two had been paired off as cellmates for more than a week. In all that time, The Whisperer had maintained a sullen, indifferent silence to all the bigger convict's advances.

The Whisperer knew his fellow convict to be Godfrey Yodens, a name that perhaps was an alias. Before he had entered Graywall, The Whisperer had been aware he would be the cellmate of the giant Yodens. Furthermore, Godfrey Yodens had been convicted of being one of three bank robbers who had entered a vault from a tunnel, blasted the big safe and escaped with more than a million in cash and securities.

Many persons were interested in the whereabouts of that stolen million. Yet Godfrey Yodens, apelike as he appeared, had shrewdly and stubbornly kept silent and refused to bargain for any part of his liberty. After a year in Graywall, the insurance companies had become interested.

This explained, in part, the presence of The Whisperer in the prison, though none connected with the insurance companies knew the notorious underworld terror had been the man selected to get inside Yodens' guarded secret. As for The Whisperer, his campaign included refusal to be friendly with Godfrey Yodens.

The big convict must come to him.

If Yodens had noticed the unusual movement of the exercising prisoners, he did not betray it now.

Yodens said to The Whisperer, "Well, little, funny man, what're yuh in for?"

The Whisperer made no reply, looking beyond Yodens as if he did not exist. The bigger convict towered above him, greater in weight and height.

"Sure, you'll damn well tell me!" growled Yodens. "No man can make the insult to me! I'll squeeze—"

Yodens' bearlike arms swung upward, started to encircle The Whisperer's body.

An eerie, penetrating whisper was the reply. But husky whispers were a custom among the prisoners, so that went unnoticed.

"I'm not talking," stated The Whisperer, his eyes apparently on a group of men being pushed back from the wall dead-line by several shouting guards.

"So you're not talkin'!" growled big Yodens. "Well, I'll just learn you not to—"

The Whisperer struck with fists that alternated so fast it must have seemed to Yodens that a dozen guards were hammering at his small, bony head.

The big convict teetered back on his heels, went off balance and fell, making an ineffectual grab at The Whisperer's body. The small man eluded him easily.

Yodens fell, hands and feet moving in a scramble to bring himself upright. It seemed to The Whisperer that the Earth itself assisted Godfrey Yodens in arising. This was the literal truth.

The ground heaved, as if some gigantic borer had suddenly flung earth and rocks upward. Yodens' bulky body struck The Whisperer and hurled him a dozen feet before they contacted the ground again.

Usually an attempted escape caused a screaming siren on No. 1 tower at the entrance gate to start an alarm. Often this eerie note of alarm had aroused the adjacent countryside. But now the siren was strangely silenced. The turret bearing the great whistle was in midair.

But there was screaming, sudden and horrible. It came from the throats of dying men. For more than a hundred yards beyond the prison gates, the great, grim wall was abruptly lifted as if some giant hand had pushed it upward from beneath. Two machine gun turrets twisted, crumpled and toppled to the outside.

Mutilated machine gunners, trapped in the barrage of broken rocks from the thick walls, went with the turrets. The screams came from scores of prisoners. The ground waved suddenly like a huge blanket over a wide area.

THE WHISPERER struck, rolled and found himself falling into a narrow crater. Stone and earth crushed upon him in a burying mass. He could still see the men who had been grouping toward the gate; only a few could possibly survive. Arms and legs were separated from the torsos of convicts who were still living.

Yodens' flopping hulk hit The Whisperer. Pandemonium swept the prison yard. Before the rocks stopped falling, the guns of some of the ground guards were flashing fire. No doubt several prisoners died without the slightest knowledge of the intent to escape.

The Whisperer, as he fell, had only time to see that some convicts were rushing the smashed walls. Some never reached the gap. They went down under tons of stones that began falling.

More than fifty men must have died in the first few seconds of the terrific blast. The Whisperer had time to think, to wonder that he himself still lived.

His hands groped. They came in contact with the rough edges of broken tiling. Then The Whisperer knew he had been hurled by chance into one of the deep underground drains. These were so solidly constructed that even if convicts could have dug down to them, it would have required days to have broken through.

Yet this pipe had burst. Then stinging fumes of smoke rolled into The Whisperer's eyes. They obscured his vision for a few seconds from the ghastly tragedy in the yard near the blasted walls.

Now he understood what had happened. He understood it even better when his vision had cleared. Five shadows came in single file from farther back in the yard. These prisoners must have been close to the tiers of cell blocks when the explosion came.

The five men moved deliberately, walking over the bodies of dead and dying men. Fierce, cold anger surged through The Whisperer. His brain was repeating, "Danvers, Baylor, Toroni, Jana and Levizo."

The five racketeers. Many whispers had told him that these five men had instructed their fellow convicts to be close to the walls by the entrance gate. Sent their fellow prisoners there, knowing the terrific explosion that had been planned.

The ripping blast had been set off in one of the great drainpipes. Perhaps some variation of TNT in liquid form had been pumped from a point close to the river. Sheer good luck had caused The Whisperer to be blown from the edge of the blasted area into a drainage ditch that had been only opened by the explosion.

THE WHISPERER seldom lost his coolness. But for a minute now, he attempted to scramble from the deep ditch. His hands were itching to be upon the throats of the five racketeers so calmly walking to freedom over the bodies of the men they had tricked into being near the gate.

Now machine gun blasts ripped from turrets where the wall was undamaged. But the range failed to reach the wide expanse of the shattered wall. The eyes of the gunners could not discern fellow guards or escaping convicts in the murk of the settling walls.

"Help me, little man with the big fists!" moaned a nearby voice.

Godfrey Yodens was trapped under a shattered rock. He was wedged in by his left arm, which was so badly fractured his weight was sustained only by flesh. Yet in that minute The Whisperer was forced to some admiration for the bank bandit who had stolen and hidden a million. The convict was calmly severing his arm.

The Whisperer was uninjured and there was the strength of three men in his compact body. His brain never ceased working. He was aware now how the explosion break might have been accomplished. Also, he recalled that Yodens and his uncaught pals had stolen the million in the bank robbery by working for weeks on a tunnel, then blowing out the floor under a steel vault.

Perhaps Yodens knew a great deal about this planned escape. It might be important later to get at the exact truth. The Whisperer performed a crude operation, freed Yodens and stopped the bleeding from his amputated arm.

Guards were shouting above, running and shooting. The Whisperer lifted Yodens' weight and groped his way along the deep ditch toward its outlet.

CHAPTER II
VANISHING CONVICTS

"YOU good fellow," mumbled Yodens. "You have safe my life. Maybe so we get out and then—"

"Never mind that now!" hissed the warning voice of The Whisperer. "Lay low and keep quiet!"

The big convict, with his left arm missing, had uttered no complaint, no word of his pain. They were lying in the utter darkness of the concrete drainage pipe where it emerged close to the shore of the river. Voices of cursing prison guards came to them.

Guns cracked. Once or twice men screamed, and their cries had the abrupt pain of death. The Whisperer swore in ghostly oaths to himself.

Five oily brained convicts, worse even than the murderers they usually employed for their killings, had used a grouping of fellow prisoners to cover up their own escape. They had known that many of these men would be killed.

Godfrey Yodens grunted.

"You funny fellow, no talk. Janna he tells me to come down by big gate and maybe so I could make a getaway."

The Whisperer made no reply. He had crawled to an opening in the big drainpipe. A detail of guards came past, flashing hand torches around. They were talking.

"Eight of our boys and we smoked out forty of the damned rats," said one guard. "We've got the highways and the river blocked. That would be the only getaway, but I think we've rounded up all that got out."

"Yeah?" said another guard. "But I've got a cold sweat. Maybe there's a hundred dead men in that mess. I'm thinking the rat that plotted this has gotten away with it."

Two other guards came hurrying down from the wrecked wall. One had a report from the warden's office.

"Warden Austin says we've made one hell of a cleanup, considering what we were up against, but seven men are still unaccounted for in the check-up on all of the dead and wounded," said the guard. "That big Godfrey Yodens and the new guy who was his cellmate haven't been found. The new guy that never talked, except in a whisper."

"Hell!" rapped out another one. "Then all that bad blood between them two was put on! I'll bet that Yodens and the whisperin' guy are behind this whole murdering scheme!"

"Maybe," said the guard from the office. "But we haven't been able to turn up any trace of

Danvers, Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo, and them five were in on the same rap. Every foot of the outside has been covered, but they've pulled some kind of a fast one and made good their escape!"

"It couldn't be done," asserted another guard. "We'll find them somewhere inside."

GODFREY YODENS scrambled up beside The Whisperer.

"Them thick-headed screws blamin' me for this," he muttered. "Maybe so I was in that bank,

The Whisperer lifted Yoden's weight and groped his way along the ditch toward its outlet.

but I have not made to kill anyone. I'm goin' out there and make—"

The Whisperer gripped Yodens' shoulders and pulled him down.

"Don't be a fool!" he hissed. "If you go out there, we'll be taking the rap for all this wholesale murder! It'll be pinned on me, anyway!"

The Whisperer did not then explain why he judged the prison break with its wholesale murder would be pinned on him. He was thinking of the persons really responsible for the escape and the murders.

Mato and Yuli!

The Whisperer said suddenly to Yodens, "You were teamed up with a fellow called Mato in that bank job, weren't you?"

"Yes—Why, damn you!"

Godfrey Yodens' somewhat slow-acting brain had given the reply The Whisperer had wanted before the giant convict caught his mistake and started to swing at the small gray man with his one remaining fist.

The Whisperer was forced to catch the weakened man before he fell. The group of guards was moving away. There seemed to be a clear space leading to a fringe of woods.

Yodens recovered and muttered thickly, "Damn! You save what is left of me, and I talk too much! Maybe so, little man, I talk some more!"

"Forget it!" came the hissing, penetrating whisper in reply.

At that, big Yodens tried to see his companion's face in the darkness.

"You make whisper talk all the time," the convict said. "So maybe you be him—The Whisperer?"

Then big Yodens clutched at his breast and sagged down. The blood had started running from his mutilated arm again. The Whisperer said, "Now you'll keep still. I'll find a way out."

Yodens' partly murmured words, his assent to a possible connection with Mato, still at large, had given The Whisperer more of an idea.

Had the five racketeers in Graywall Prison somehow unearthed the secret of the hidden million in loot? Had they wanted Yodens to die along with other prisoners for that reason, while they made their escape to join Mato?

Sporadic gunfire sounded up near the wrecked wall of the prison. The Whisperer could see little groups of convicts being herded toward the cell blocks. He was fully aware that the truck highways and the river were being closely guarded. Graywall Prison was set deep in the upstate hills.

There was left only the single railroad line. It seemed clearly impossible that the five missing racketeers could have been foolish enough to follow the railroad line. They would not be able to get far-enough away before morning to escape being picked up.

THE WHISPERER was now carrying the huge bulk of Godfrey Yodens. The bleeding of his arm had been checked again, but Yodens was unconscious. The Whisperer gave a little laugh, which always sounded like the stage sound effect intended to represent a ghostly chuckle.

This expression of humor was because what he had expected weeks to bring about had been touched off like powder by the murderous break made by the five racketeers.

For The Whisperer had been in Graywall Prison for the single purpose of assisting Godfrey Yodens to escape. His early silence had been to avert suspicion. He had wanted the big convict to believe he hated him thoroughly, before he "accidentally" opened the way to the outside.

Warden Austin knew of this planned escape. Permission to the warden had come down from the governor himself. One of the State's biggest insurance companies stood to win or lose a million on the chance of Yodens leading some other person to his bank loot cache.

If that had been accomplished, it had then been planned to deport Godfrey Yodens, who was an alien. One of the thousands of criminals who had never even claimed citizenship rights, but who had for years been preying upon an American society too soft-handed to ship them out of the country.

In this case, the governor and Warden Austin had joined with the insurance company in seeking the aid of one man whose hard-handed methods had placed his police department at the top. That man was James "Wildcat" Gordon, commissioner of police.

The name "Wildcat" had been earned many times by the fighting commissioner. He was a man of medium size, a former Army officer, and harder than nails. But each ounce of him was worth two ounces of most other men in any give-and-take battle. As commissioner, he wore the gaudiest of attire, including a red necktie, yellow shoes and a carnation in his buttonhole.

A new Army hat was perpetually cocked over

one eye. The hat was there the day he looked at the governor out of one eye that might have been gray or blue.

It has been said those light Texas eyes were killer's eyes.

Anyway, Wildcat Gordon had promised to send to Graywall Prison a man who could handle the proposition of Godfrey Yodens. A man who could be trusted to aid in the escape and get to the secret of the stolen bank money.

Now, as he bore the weight of Yodens over his broad shoulders, listening to the occasional crack of a sniping shot back at the blasted prison, The Whisperer's chuckle sounded again. For The Whisperer was none other than Wildcat Gordon himself.

And at this moment, if he were lucky enough to evade prowling guards and citizen posses quickly formed, Wildcat Gordon was sure he would meet the man who had made it possible for him to be The Whisperer.

That man was Dick Traeger, a retired deputy police commissioner who had fathered Wildcat's police career, had been almost a father to him in other ways.

Dick Traeger, known as "Quick Trigger," had fashioned the odd dental plates that changed the whole contour of Wildcat Gordon's face and gave him that fear-inspiring whisper.

At this moment, The Whisperer was sure that old Quick Trigger would be waiting, as he had been waiting every night, to participate in the planned escape of Godfrey Yodens.

The governor and Warden Austin had not suspected the whispering man sent to become convict No. 7,555 was the fighting Wildcat Gordon himself.

Keeping his double identity a secret had enabled the tough ex-Army officer to solve many baffling cases. He hoped to solve many more by similar means, though it placed him in the dangerous position of being an enemy of both the underworld and his own police.

The Whisperer got through the fringe of trees. He could see the graded cut of the railroad not far below. It looked as if this would be easier going. The Whisperer scrambled down the embankment. But he did not proceed far between the rails.

Muttering voices, moving lights indicated that the railroad as well as the highways had been swiftly blocked off after the explosion at the prison. Apparently, no convicts had been foolhardy enough to try the railway that led only into the hills and would have no train during the night hours.

The Whisperer was beginning to sweat. The unconscious body was no light burden. Leaving the railroad, he turned into a hidden and abandoned side highway. He proceeded a short distance before his whispering voice penetrated the trees with a ghostly echo.

FROM up on the narrow road came an immediate low whistle. A match flicked on and went out. A minute later, The Whisperer was putting the unconscious Yodens into the rumble seat of a coupé and closing the lid.

"Reckon you didn't do so good, Wildcat," grunted a querulous voice. "What for did you have to go and blow up the gates an' kill off a lot of men?"

Close by appeared the bald head of an oldish man who was slightly stoop-shouldered. His head wagged and shook gray flags of hair over his ears.

The older man added: "I see you brought that fellow Yodens along, but do you always have to bring them back dead?"

The Whisperer said in his hissing voice, "So you've already heard The Whisperer blew up the gates?"

"That's the word out among some of the posses that have been prowlin' around, Wildcat. Dang my time, I wish I'd never made those fool dental plates! How am I goin' to keep Tiny stalled along that you're on a fishin' trip? That girl's got some sense, even if she is my own blood!"

"Tiny" Trigger was Quick Trigger's granddaughter.

"Been keepin' coffee hot every night, expectin' me back, huh?"

"Reckon you know Tiny'd do that, Wildcat. Now what do we do?"

"Well, Quick Trigger, it will be a good idea for the present to let it be known that The Whisperer blew up the gates and killed a lot of men. It will give me a chance to do some needed snooping around. Also, Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton will be catching five kinds of hell from the governor and Warden Austin because Commissioner Gordon sent them an anarchist like that."

Old Quick Trigger shook his head dubiously. He could not always understand the workings of Wildcat's mind. At that instant hand torches appeared in the abandoned road.

As usual, some State police and citizens were making plenty of noise in their convict hunt. This usually helps the convicts to get away and keeps up the courage of the posses.

"Hellamighty!" exploded Wildcat. "Any way out of this road, Quick Trigger?"

"Nope. She's blocked by a fallen tree."

"O.K.," snapped Wildcat Gordon suddenly, removing his dental plates. "We'll be having a talk with Warden Austin!"

Wildcat's hands were moving over his clothes. As they dropped, he was snatching other garments

from a pocket of the little car. White powder came off his hair. Zippers turned his shoes yellow.

The hard-eyed, jaunty Commissioner Gordon stepped into the middle of the old road, meeting the oncoming posse.

CHAPTER III
"GET THE WHISPERER!"

"IT'S nobody but that damned Whisperer, but how he happened to get into the prison no one seems to know!" rapped out one of the State police in the posse. "Maybe it's luck you're up here on a fishin' trip, Commissioner! Lord knows, we need some brains to get to the bottom of this!"

"Thanks," said Wildcat Gordon, coolly flicking a petal from a carnation in his buttonhole. "Quick Trigger and I were trying to find a lake up on this side road, when we heard all hell break loose. I thought we heard some fellows running through the woods, but I didn't know what had happened, so we were turning back."

Wildcat faced the posse men with only one eye visible under his cocked Army hat. He noted that the lid of the coupé rumble seat was raised the fraction of an inch. He hoped that Yodens had not come to.

It might be difficult to explain an escaped convict to his posse visitors. For his own purposes, it would be more difficult to explain himself as Wildcat Gordon to the prisoner from whom he hoped to extract a million-dollar secret.

The posse pushed on along the abandoned road. Quick Trigger jolted the coupé out of the side road. At a point just above Graywall Prison, Wildcat took the wheel and instructed Quick Trigger to await his return.

Wildcat made sure the rumble seat lid was closed as he drove between the armed guards hedging in the blasted wall. Warden Austin was a scholarly and gloomy man. Perhaps his position had made him that way. Two guards accompanied the coupé, riding on the running boards.

Wildcat's eyes only flickered as he saw them holding on by the rumble seat lid. If Yodens was conscious, the big convict was surely playing wise.

Warden Austin stared at the gaudy figure of Wildcat Gordon. His eyes were black, direct and filled with anger.

"So you arrange an escape from my prison to trick an inmate, and I take the governor's word for it that you would send me a dependable fellow!" barked Warden Austin. "I have liked some of the results of your police work, Gordon, but I agree with Mayor Van Royston that your roughshod methods are tough on other people.

"Gordon, I have reason to believe the man you sent me to become convict No. 7,555, D. Smith, a burglar, is responsible for the deaths of a hundred men and the escape of five notorious racketeers we have been unable to round up!"

WILDCAT had only one colorless eye visible under the Army hat. He waved one square-fingered hand at the nearby guards and spoke mildly. Those who knew Wildcat best were always on guard at his mild tone.

"I thought it was agreed that all this was to have been a confidence between ourselves, warden. Driving in here, after I heard of this, I find the word has been generally spread that a convict known as The Whisperer was responsible for the explosion."

"Confidence, hell!" jerked out Warden Austin. "You send me a man for an inside job, and he blows the devil out of the works! The man we were framing for an escape—Godfrey Yodens—is gone, so that proves your man is responsible!"

"I wouldn't jump at conclusions," stated Wildcat quietly. "I sent no man to you. That was why I was rushing here personally. The man I had selected was apparently murdered and sunk in the river and the credentials I had given him were taken. I did not learn of this until a few hours ago, and since then all your wires have been out. So I came myself to warn you."

Wildcat Gordon voiced his explanation on the spur of the moment. Old Quick Trigger would have said, "On the spur of one of his craziest moments."

"What? What?" barked Warden Austin. "You knew your man arrived here a week ago, for I phoned you!"

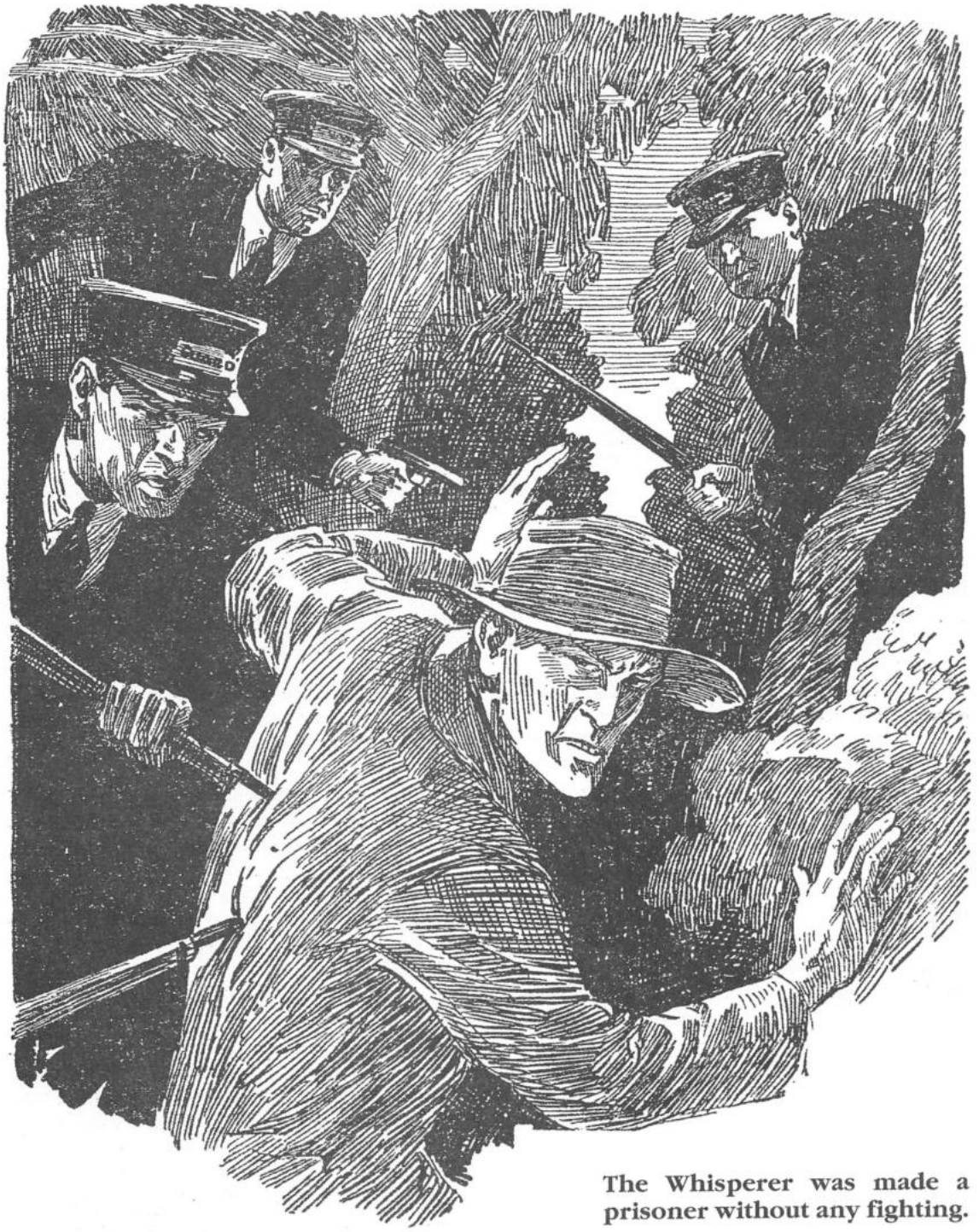
"Sure enough, warden. But you only explained he had the proper credentials, and I had no means of knowing until today that the man who should have brought those credentials probably is weighted at the bottom of the river. You see, this man everyone is now claiming to be the notorious Whisperer probably was smart enough to know how to use the credentials."

Warden Austin muttered an oath.

"But how am I going to explain it? What are we going to do, Gordon?"

"I would do my best, warden, to apprehend this slick Whisperer, and then I would make every effort to get back your five prize racketeers. I would say that perhaps this Whisperer may have been working with them, as they seem to be the only other convicts gone with Yodens."

FIVE minutes later, Wildcat Gordon had given his personal promise he would have a general alarm sent out for The Whisperer. Then he turned his coupé, being forced to avoid rows of mangled bodies as he drove from the wrecked gates.



The Whisperer was made a prisoner without any fighting.

"Just as well," Wildcat remarked to the world in general, "to have taken them barking up the wrong tree."

Well outside the prison walls, Wildcat picked up Quick Trigger. As the older man climbed in beside him, the car's radio started a call. A general alarm was being sent out for the notorious Whisperer.

Wildcat drove swiftly along one truck highway. He was crossing the single railroad track when he suddenly halted the coupé.

"They never could have made it out on the road or across the river," he stated more to himself than Quick Trigger. "So I've got an idea."

"Our ideas haven't panned out so good,

Wildcat," complained Quick Trigger. "But I'm thinkin' the posses haven't been payin' enough attention to that railroad."

"Right!" snapped Wildcat. "And there's a heap of hell brewing somewhere, or the break wouldn't have been made the way it was. That's why I'm having Warden Austin setting the dogs on The Whisperer!"

"Dang my time, Wildcat!" grunted Quick Trigger. "Some of these days you'll be puttin' The Whisperer up against too much, and then where'll you be?"

Wildcat merely whistled through his teeth. The night had settled into a misty curtain caused by river fog. Big Godfrey Yodens appeared to still be out. Perhaps he was out for good, was Wildcat's thought.

"Now why did Danvers, Baylor and the other racket boys want him rubbed out in that big blow-off?" he was thinking. "Or did they? Perhaps they had thought he would make it out of the prison death yard."

Wildcat had sent the fast coupé spinning along a crossroad into the hills. He was following his hunch. That side road would cross the single railroad line nearly twenty miles above where the prison lookout had been planted.

Had there been some manner by which the five racketeers could have passed the guard position before it had been established?

Mist formed water that dripped from the trees. The side road was narrow and slippery. It was little more than a snakelike trail following the line of rail.

"Watch that your road isn't caved in," warned Quick Trigger. "A steep cut has been made down to the railroad tracks just ahead and the road follows the edge."

Wildcat instantly applied squealing brakes. But it had not been Quick Trigger's warning that had caused the action. Wheels had made a high, screeching sound on the railroad track below. Yet there had been no sound of an approaching train. The screeching was cut in two by the fearful scream of a human voice. It was a cry from which the agony died as if air had been let out of a deflated balloon.

A rending crash followed instantly. Wildcat and Quick Trigger hit the ground together. Wildcat paused only long enough to make sure Godfrey Yodens was breathing back in the rumble seat. The commissioner and former deputy went over the edge and rolled down a steep gravel bank swiftly.

WILDCAT landed in the darkness with his hands in contact with soft human flesh. His fingers instinctively gripped, then they let go. Seconds later his flashlight showed what had been a man, without doubt a railroad track walker. His smashed lantern lay to one side of his gruesome corpse.

"So that was the big payoff on the getaway!" snapped Wildcat.

Before them lay a sleek, streamlined automobile, its body of shining aluminum. But the hard steel and rubber wheels had flanges geared to the rails. No doubt, this novel means of transportation had been in wait for the escaping racketeers in a spot least to be suspected quickly, the railroad.

For it was known to be hours before another train was scheduled. Escape by the motor highways or the river had been the first to be blocked. The railroad had been left to the last.

Wildcat and Quick Trigger worked swiftly, with guns held ready. Their hand torches probed the modern car, wrecked when it crashed into the track walker's body. Very apparently, all of the fugitives on the speeding auto rail car had escaped.

"Look out, Wildcat!" came Quick Trigger's voice suddenly.

The older man had thrown himself into the bushes. His quick senses had caught the crackle of bushes up toward the road. At almost the same instant a whanging bullet smashed the hand torch from Quick Trigger's hand.

Slugs pounded around Wildcat, ripped into the wrecked rail car. The slope down which they had descended was of gravel, but slippery with the mist.

"Stay where you are, Quick Trigger!" rapped out Wildcat.

He was transforming himself swiftly into the character of The Whisperer. There was a chance—a slight one—that if he reached the fugitive racketeers as a supposed fellow convict, he might have some opportunity to travel along with them. The guns quieted as he was halfway up the slope.

Quick Trigger, scorning to be left out of any battle, was following at a slower pace. The motor of the coupé exploded. There were harsh voices. One arose above the others.

"Maybe I've gone soft, but that was a nasty job, chief!"

A voice groaned with pain. The Whisperer knew it was the tone of Godfrey Yodens, the queer, big convict whose speech was a trifle off on its English.

The voice said, "You will never make to find it now—"

A crunching blow came with the speeding up of the coupé's motor. Mud and gravel spewed into The Whisperer's face from the rear wheels of his own coupé.

When The Whisperer reached the road at the top of the bluff, a red taillight winked at him. He hissed out oaths and some hope for a quick and unmerciful finish for the car thieves and killers.

He would have taken a chance on attempting to intercept the coupé by taking a short cut through the woods, but the figure lying in the mud under the ray of his flashlight was too ghastly to leave as it was.

The pale eyes of Godfrey Yodens blinked pain from underneath their light eyebrows. The Whisperer stared for half a minute at the atrocity which had been committed.

Yodens was still living, his breath coming in feeble gasps. His gray prison shirt was open. An irregular patch of skin had been stripped away, leaving raw, red flesh.

Quick Trigger thrust himself beside the Whisperer.

"What is it—Why, the inhuman devils!"

The skull of Godfrey Yodens had been almost beaten in over one eye. The Whisperer lifted the man's head. It seemed the blow had restored the big convict to a final, brief flash of consciousness.

Yodens had been pulled out of the coupé rumble seat to the muddy road. There was instant evidence that the big man had been only a pawn in the game of the five racketeers.

They had wanted to find him, it was apparent; but after that it was only a portion of his body that was wanted: That patch of skin, perhaps six irregular inches in diameter, which came from his bleeding chest.

"But in the name of the devils, why?"

Quick Trigger, as deputy commissioner of police, as an associate of The Whisperer, had looked often upon the results of violence, of brutality. This thing he now saw might have been the work of savages in the jungle.

"This is why," came The Whisperer's grim, husky tone—the tone that accompanied low speaking when his odd dental plates were in position. "See those orange-and-red streaks?"

"A sailor?" said old Quick Trigger. "Been needled!"

"Tattooed, yes, but I have my doubts about him being a sailor," said The Whisperer. "Take that small flask from my hip, Quick Trigger. Maybe he can talk some."

THE WHISPERER was holding the big shoulders of Godfrey Yodens in his arms. The man's small head rolled weakly.

"Good little man—The Whisperer—" gasped Yodens.

A fiery swallow from the flask of brandy started him choking. A bit more of life came into his pale eyes.

"Danvers—Baylor—" The voice was low, was gradually fading out. "Sixteenth floor—Barkley. See Nell—Nell—"

The head of the big convict fell forward. The chin touched the raw flesh of his torn chest. He was dead.

The Whisperer placed the body gently on the ground. Godfrey Yodens had escaped from Graywall Prison. He had been aided by The Whisperer in that escape, but it was not in the manner originally planned.

Quick Trigger had moved swiftly into the nearby bushes. Now he returned, swearing lustily.

"They made the main highway to Ponto Hills and from there they went like a bat out of hell!"

The coupé of The Whisperer was definitely gone. Posses might have heard the shooting, or they might not. The Whisperer was thinking. "Nothing above here but scattered farmhouses and hill shacks. The five fugitives—perhaps six—would avoid these. They would not drive the coupé far along a main highway with the convict hunt in full swing."

The Whisperer could think of only one place available to obtain another car: That would be the Rayburn Asylum, a group of buildings where mental cases were housed. This was but a short distance above Graywall Prison itself on one of the main highways.

"Quick Trigger," he said. "It's plain enough that our hunt jumps from here back to the city. I happen to recall the sixteenth floor of the Barkley Block is occupied by a big diamond-cutting outfit. You get down to the Rayburn Asylum, borrow a car and wait for me near the main gate. I'll be along."

Quick Trigger disappeared, grumbling. The Whisperer turned swiftly back to the body of Godfrey Yoder. It required but a few minutes to place the corpse in a shallow grave covered with rocks.

The Whisperer disliked crooks of every variety. Yet he was forced to admit that this strange Godfrey Yodens had gone out with all the spirit of a brave man.

CHAPTER IV
WHEN THE ASYLUM BURNED

THE WHISPERER made a quick estimate of time. There would be the house of some farmer not far away, but few lacked telephones. A grim smile came over his queerly pointed face.

The five fleeing racketeers would be sure Godfrey Yodens was dead. That would enable them to take their time about whatever enterprise was indicated by that tattooed symbol so brutally ripped from the breast of the dead convict.

Days, even weeks, might elapse before they sought to apply the knowledge that must have been in that indelible symbol. The five who had been in

prison and this Mato and Yuli, on the outside, were the kind who could wait for months to make sure they were safe.

"But," thought The Whisperer, "if they believed they had failed to kill Godfrey Yodens, it would make a difference. Suppose they were made to think that the mutilated man had survived and was at liberty? Would that not hasten their application of the knowledge they had? In other words, would they not fear the vengeance of Yodens himself?"

The Whisperer acted quickly upon this thought. He headed up the side road, watching for the first light that indicated a farmer's house. He smiled again. With all the countryside aroused and looking for The Whisperer, he desired to have it made known that The Whisperer had been at this exact spot, could have assisted Godfrey Yodens in his escape.

A red-faced farmer confronted him at this door. The Whisperer pushed in quickly, intercepting the man's movement toward the fireplace, over which a rifle was slung. The farmer's instant movement indicated he had at once identified the description of the wanted Whisperer.

"Be quiet and you will not be hurt!"

That chilling, deadly whisper had stopped many braver men than this farmer. The red-faced fellow froze in his tracks. He lifted his hands slowly.

"Whatcha want—I ain't got—"

"I'll use the telephone, that will be all!" commanded the icy whisper. "Stay where you are, if you want to live!"

IN a minute, The Whisperer had made sure the lines to Graywall Prison had been restored. He was talking in his low, husky voice directly to the operator in Warden Austin's office.

He purposely refused to wait for the warden in person. His intent was to have it believed he was a scared resident of the hills.

"I've seen 'em!" he told the warden's office, as if in breathless terror. "That fella the radio's been talkin' about that blowed up your place! Him an' a big convict with a little head went by my place, an' they stopped an' grabbed some bread an' ham! I couldn't do nothin' but give it to 'em! I'll betcha they're headed for the back hills!"

The prison operator was saying, "I'll get Warden Austin! Please wait!"

The Whisperer did not wait. He replaced the phone receiver and swung back to the red-faced farmer. His eerie whisper gave instructions.

"I'm wanting them to think the big convict an' me are goin' into the hills, see? Well, we ain't. We're headin' for a place across the river. You haven't heard or seen anybody, if you're asked. If you don't keep your mouth shut, I'll come back and—"

The Whisperer was at the door. He closed it on his own words and started swiftly toward the highway leading to Rayburn Asylum where Quick Trigger should have a car by this time. He chuckled as he imagined the story the red-faced farmer would tell.

But at least he had established the belief that both the Whisperer and Godfrey Yodens were alive and had been at this place. It made slight difference whether the manhunters went into the hills or made a search across the river. In a few minutes, The Whisperer would be Wildcat Gordon, driving safely along the main highway with Quick Trigger.

The Whisperer had made one grave mistake. The farmer's telephone was on a four-partyline. Folks in the hills had the extremely impolite habit of listening in on conversations when they heard the phone rings that called their neighbors.

Less than half a mile away, an excited farmer had listened in on The Whisperer's conversation. He had dropped his receiver and dashed into the highway. Unfortunately for The Whisperer, the farmer immediately intercepted a car carrying four guards from Graywall Prison.

The Whisperer had not yet changed back to the identity of Wildcat Gordon as he reached the main highway a mile or so above Rayburn Asylum. He also failed to see the darkened car which was parked inconspicuously to one side of the highway.

"Smart, huh? Well, get 'em up high! Damned high!"

THE hard voice came from the roadside bushes. The polished barrel of a rifle gleamed dully in the night. The point of the gun was rammed into The Whisperer's side, with force enough to almost crack a rib.

"An' we'd like to let you have it, you rat!" snarled another voice.

The muzzle of a second rifle ground into The Whisperer's back. Two men sprang in front of him and hard knuckles smashed into his forehead.

Four prison guards were seeing in the darkness the man they had known as convict No. 7,555, D. Smith, burglar. The convict they believed to be responsible for the deaths of several of their fellow guards in the prison break.

The Whisperer obeyed the commands without speaking. He was given one break. In their excited exuberation at being the lucky ones to apprehend the much wanted dynamiter and killer, the four guards pushed him toward their car without making a search. Apparently, he was the gray-clad No. 7,555, and he had no weapon showing.

The guards would have been amazed at the pair of queer, modern automatics which lay along The Whisperer's lean sides. Weapons that could be

flashed into his hand with hardly visible movement. Not that he would have employed them against these honest representatives of the law, but there was a chance they might become useful.

"What's become of that big Yodens?" growled one of the guards. "He was with you! Talk up, an' maybe it'll go easier with you!"

The Whisperer grimly reflected that nothing under heaven could make it easier for the man believed to have wiped out nearly a hundred men and engineered the prison break. He replied huskily.

"Yodens got across the river, and I was—"

The guard nearest him could hardly be blamed for smashing the back of his hand across The Whisperer's face.

"Quitcher lyin'! You know damned well both of you were breakin' for the hills! We'll drive up to that place where you phoned an' then if you don't talk fast, maybe you won't even have a trial, see?"

The Whisperer said nothing. This rough guard was a man after his own heart. It was one of his own firm convictions that much, far too much of the taxpayers' money is wasted upon known killers.

The Whisperer was jammed into the back seat of the open car between two guards. The others were in front. Neither of his companions spared his ribs as they used pistols to keep him in place. He considered it fortunate that the guards apparently were not equipped with handcuffs.

For The Whisperer had one trick left, and handcuffs would have frustrated any attempt to employ it.

Blood seeped from the bruises on his face. The Whisperer considered this as a part of a daring plan. It made a simple deception much more difficult unless he got an extremely lucky break. But even The Whisperer did not suspect the break he was to get.

The guards' car went from the main highway into the road leading to the place where the telephone had been used. Before its wheels left the concrete, all of the sky to the westward flared into greenish-white flame. Directly upon the appearance of this fire came a muffled explosion.

An oath from one of the guards. "Another one, by hell!"

The driver's foot jammed on the brakes.

"Looks like the Rayburn Asylum! If that bunch of—"

The driver's exclamation was abruptly ended. The flash of fire, the startling shock of the blast quivering on the air, had distracted the attention of The Whisperer's captors. The pistols had slipped from his side for the fraction of a second.

ONE of The Whisperer's hard fists drove into the skull of the driver, catching him flatly between the ears. Whipcord muscles snapped in The Whisperer's legs and he let his own head take the force of a punch that hit his left-side guard under an ear.

The combined weight of the two men snapped the car door open. A pistol flamed too late to do more than chill The Whisperer's spine as a slug creased the skin of his throat.

The Whisperer did not strike again. He dived over the guard he had knocked from the car, striking and rolling into hillside brush. Almost instantly the brush seemed to be alive with the chilling whines of bullets.

None of the four guards had been put out of business. The Whisperer had only the darkness and the thickness of the brush to protect him from the searching slugs. The cursing, outwitted guards plunged down the hill after the fugitive.

The Whisperer had only the one advantage of the pursued over the pursuer. He did not have to select his direction. The guards were forced to listen to guide themselves.

The Whisperer had amazing skill at moving silently and swiftly in the bush. That came from his days in the Army. There was an interval when the guards held off all shooting to listen for some betraying sound. And in that brief space of respite, The Whisperer found a deep, narrow gully.

Now without a target, the guards were threshing around aimlessly. The Whisperer employed his minute or two in that gully to quick advantage. The guards were still searching, swearing, when they heard the cold, hard voice of another man.

"Damn you to—"

More words were lost in smashing blows, the apparent groaning of a man who had been hit by a fist or a club. Down in a dark gully a hand-to-hand battle was apparently being waged to a finish.

"Hold him!" yelled a guard. "We're coming!"

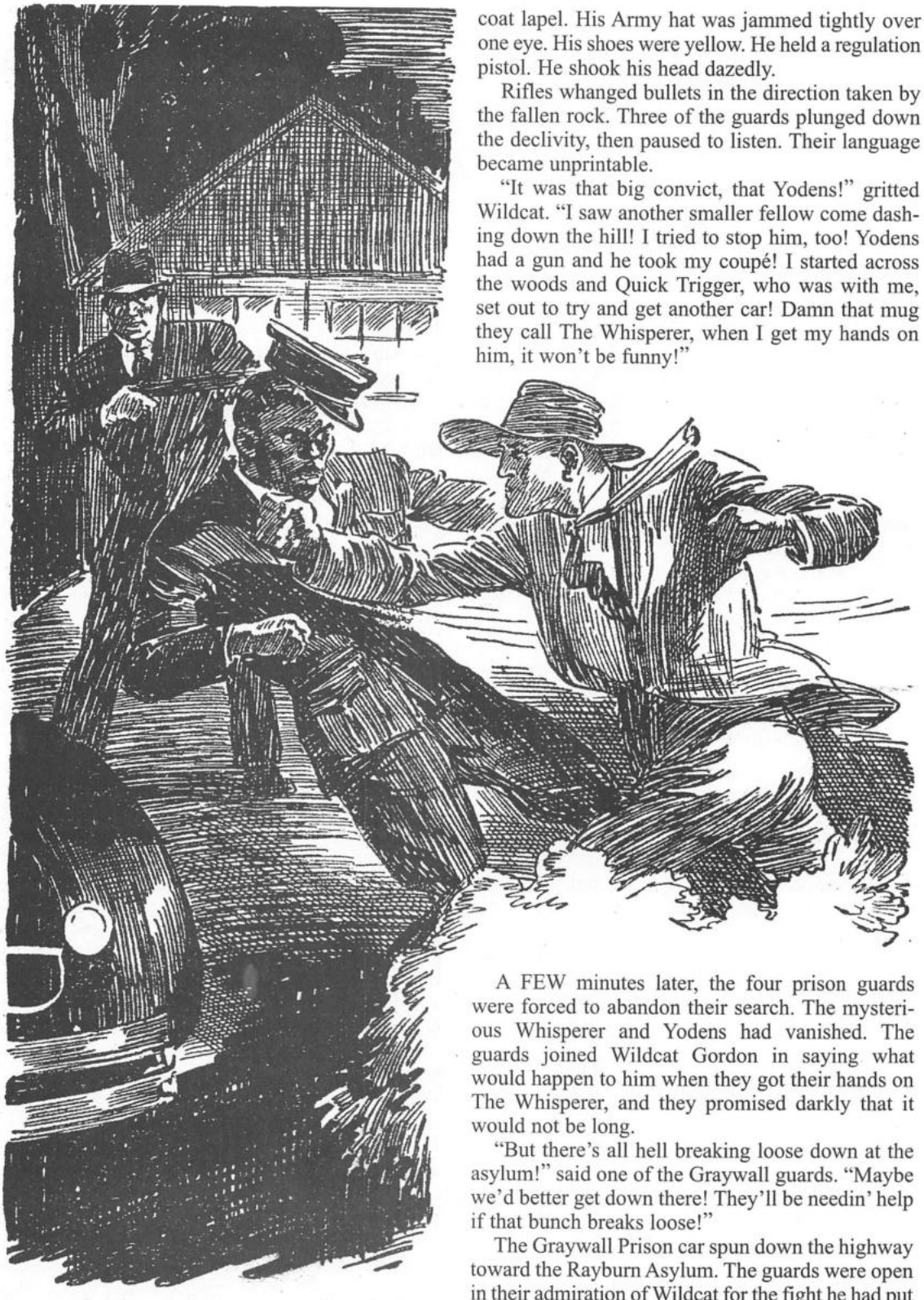
The hard voice shouted again. There were more oaths, more smashing blows. The four guards banged into trees, almost tore off their uniforms in the brush. Two of the guards had heard that same voice before. All carried rifles and pistols, but they could not now take a chance on using them.

Suddenly there was a crashing as if a man were breaking away through the brush. The guards could not know that was a heavy rock smashing down a declivity at the end of the gully. A man apparently fell to the ground, groaning. But he was up and staggering about when the guards reached him.

"Where'd he go? What happened? You fellas get after him!"

One of the guards sliced a flashlight into the swollen, bleeding face of Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. The guard would have been amazed to know it had been his own knuckles that had caused the seeping bruises.

Shreds of a rumpled carnation hung in Wildcat's



One of The Whisperer's hard fists drove into the skull of the driver, catching him flatly between the ears.

coat lapel. His Army hat was jammed tightly over one eye. His shoes were yellow. He held a regulation pistol. He shook his head dazedly.

Rifles whanged bullets in the direction taken by the fallen rock. Three of the guards plunged down the declivity, then paused to listen. Their language became unprintable.

"It was that big convict, that Yodens!" gritted Wildcat. "I saw another smaller fellow come dashing down the hill! I tried to stop him, too! Yodens had a gun and he took my coupé! I started across the woods and Quick Trigger, who was with me, set out to try and get another car! Damn that mug they call The Whisperer, when I get my hands on him, it won't be funny!"

A FEW minutes later, the four prison guards were forced to abandon their search. The mysterious Whisperer and Yodens had vanished. The guards joined Wildcat Gordon in saying what would happen to him when they got their hands on The Whisperer, and they promised darkly that it would not be long.

"But there's all hell breaking loose down at the asylum!" said one of the Graywall guards. "Maybe we'd better get down there! They'll be needin' help if that bunch breaks loose!"

The Graywall Prison car spun down the highway toward the Rayburn Asylum. The guards were open in their admiration of Wildcat for the fight he had put up in the woods. The story they now had included how the police commissioner had tackled not only big Yodens, but The Whisperer himself.

The car swung around a turn in the road. Brakes squealed as the driver brought the car to a jarring halt. Two-score screaming gibbering men were running down the road. Behind them was what seemed to be a long, continuous wall of flame and smoke. The highway was brilliantly illuminated.

The four prison guards sprang into the highway in front of the two-score fleeing inmates of the asylum.

Wildcat Gordon's voice was suddenly cold, commanding.

"Don't shoot, boys! Better risk having them loose for a time than to kill any of the poor devils! They'll be picked up soon enough! I'd say to get on all the nearest telephones and warn everybody possible to be on their guard!"

The small flood of screaming asylum inmates rolled past. The prison guards saw the logic of Wildcat's advice. Perhaps the majority of these men were harmless. Shooting them down would be useless slaughter.

There was horror, however, along the high, red fence of the burning asylum. The fire had apparently caused many inmates to be liberated from one of the buildings. The high, red fence with its strands of barbed wire at the top had burned and fallen for more than two hundred yards.

Crazed inmates of the asylum were attempting to reach the outside through this inferno. Some had been caught on the wire and their cries told they were dying. Some of the more excitable attendants of the big institution had used their guns, so there were bodies scattered inside the burning fence.

Bedlam had broken loose in others of the buildings that were safe from the blaze. Wildcat saw Quick Trigger's bald head. The former deputy commissioner had his hands burned. He tried to conceal them. Quick Trigger had saved two men from death after the wire had caught them.

"There was some kind of an explosion in the main building just as I got to the asylum gates," said Quick Trigger. "The officials got out, but the administration offices are gone; and I heard one official say that all of the records of the inmates had been burned."

"Let me see," said Wildcat, in a musing tone, "that explosion came about the time the racketeers in our coupé were—"

"Could have been an easy fifty miles away!" snapped old Quick Trigger. "And we won't be getting any car out of here, because the asylum garage went up with the rest of the works!"

Jabbering inmates with torn clothing were being herded back into safer territory. The asylum fire apparatus, augmented by that from Graywall Prison a few miles down the highway, had subdued the worst of the fire.

WILDCAT GORDON looked for the second time that night on scattered bodies. In this case, they were those of unfortunates. Except for the few who had fled down the roads, all inmates had been accounted for.

"Or as nearly as we can check up," said a distracted official. "It may take several weeks to make sure. The records went up with the main building. There is no doubt but that gasoline stored in the office basement exploded."

Wildcat saw that the high, red fence with its barbed wire extended from this main building for half a mile up the highway. This was the yard in which the asylum inmates were permitted to take their exercise.

Wildcat studied the burned garage thoughtfully. Apparently, more than a dozen cars had been stored there. They were now only heaps of twisted metal.

"We can do nothing more here, Quick Trigger," stated Wildcat. "I'll make one more checkup with Warden Austin."

"No, by heavens, no, Gordon!" boomed Warden Austin's voice over the phone a few minutes later. "We haven't got The Whisperer, Yodens or the other five men in on that racket rap! The governor is fighting tread, and he has got in contact with Mayor Van Royston! Mayor Van Royston wants to see you as soon as you reach the city!"

CHAPTER V
THE MAYOR IS MAD

DESPITE the word that Mayor Van Royston wished to see him, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon made no effort whatever to reach police headquarters before ten o'clock the following morning.

Mayor Van Royston was not only waiting to see him, but he had been making fruitless efforts for many hours to reach his police commissioner by telephone.

It was some minutes before ten o'clock. Mayor Van Royston was getting madder by the minute. Though it was morning, the thin shanked mayor wore a tall silk hat, gray spats and other accessories conforming to the proper dress of a chief city executive about to welcome some visiting dignitary.

However, Mayor Van Royston was at this time in no condition for a welcoming speech. His head was held back on his thin neck and this had the effect of thrusting his retreating chin to an even line with his nose.

"Blazes!" said the mayor emphatically, employing perhaps his most emphatic oath. "Wildcat Gordon has gone a step too far this time! Permitting papers from this department to fall into the hands of The Whisperer and blowing up our State prison, besides burning an asylum and killing hundreds of men! Do you agree with me, Deputy Bolton?"

This combined statement from the indignant mayor covered a lot of territory. Perhaps the high-hat Mayor Van Rolston did not really mean to charge Wildcat with all of these crimes, but he was too mad to punctuate his phrases. Nevertheless, the man addressed as Deputy Bolton nodded a jerky agreement with all the mayor had implied.

"That's what I think, Mayor Van Royston," he said, unpleasantly. "Besides that, I don't know anything about this man that Warden Austin has been told was drowned at the bottom of the river. The morgue hasn't got the body."

In view of the statement made by Wildcat Gordon to Warden Austin that The Whisperer must have taken the papers from the clothes of a man still at the bottom of the river, it would seem obvious the morgue had not yet received the body. Wildcat never overlooked little details like that when he found deception necessary to the police business.

When Wildcat lied, he lied all the way.

Mayor Van Royston glanced at his wristwatch.

"This time, Deputy Bolton, I'm going to take steps," he stated firmly.

"Steps should be taken," agreed Deputy Bolton.

And why should not Henry Bolton, deputy police commissioner, have agreed with the taking of steps? Ever since the advent of Wildcat Gordon into the police commissioner's chair, Henry Bolton had felt he had been cheated of that job. For he had been the man whom Mayor Van Royston would have named as commissioner.

It so happened, however, that Van Royston needed votes. These votes had come from the Reform Party. Then certain controlling figures in the party had made it known to Mayor Van Royston that James Wildcat Gordon was the party's selection for commissioner.

Van Royston was a good hand at receptions, and a vote-getter in silk-hat circles. But the Reform Party had wanted a breathing spell from a crime wave. And Wildcat Gordon had given plenty of satisfaction in that direction.

Only it happened that the hard-boiled former Army officer gave no heed to Mayor Van Royston's soft-handed—he called them soft-headed—ideas on the subject of dealing with killers and racketeers. Also, Deputy Henry Bolton had done much to oppose his commissioner and play in with the silk-hatted mayor.

SO matters stood at three minutes before ten o'clock when the incensed Mayor Van Royston was strutting up and down in the commissioner's office. Early newspaper editions were headlining the prison break, the escape of the notorious Whisperer and others, and the fire at the Rayburn Asylum. The governor's secretary was calling at intervals to obtain Mayor Van Royston's report from his commissioner.

The newspapers had no reason to connect the explosion at the Graywall Prison and Rayburn Asylum, but two such happenings made a nice news coincidence. Perhaps Wildcat Gordon had excellent reason for connecting the two events, but he had not voiced this to anyone, even to Quick Trigger.

The headquarters buzzer on Wildcat Gordon's desk gave forth an insistent summons. Mayor Van Royston took the call.

"No, governor. Not yet. Yes, governor. No, governor. When he comes in, I am planning his immediate suspension until this extraordinary conduct is fully explained. Yes, governor. Surely, I know Commissioner Gordon will be made to take full responsibility for—"

In spite of Deputy Henry Bolton's quick effort to signal to the mayor, the telephone suddenly left Mayor Van Royston's hand. A voice as incisive as a steel saw grating across a block of ice said, "Yes, governor. Commissioner Gordon will take full responsibility. I will begin by getting my office cleared of interference. And, by the way, governor, I expect to be too busy to talk over the telephone the rest of today."

THE phone snapped back into its cradle on the desk. Commissioner Wildcat Gordon slapped his hard body into the swinging chair and erected a pair of offensively yellow shoes to one corner of the desk. One colorless eye squinted at Deputy Henry Bolton.

"Henry, you will send Detective Sergeant Thorsen to me as you go out! A holdup outfit he's been working the fish markets on the front! You will take a detail and see what you can find out!"

"But—but—Commissioner Gordon!" Mayor Van Royston managed to finish severely. "I have told Henry that—"

"The business I have with Sergeant Thorsen is strictly confidential, Mayor Van Royston!" snapped Wildcat. "If you want further conversation with the governor, there are telephones in other offices!"

"Why—Henry, you will stay here!" sputtered the mayor. "Commissioner Gordon, I demand that—"

"If Henry isn't out of this office in three seconds flat, it will cost him three days for insubordination! Henry, send in Sergeant Thorsen!"

Henry Bolton had a long nose, narrow eyes and an acrobatic Adam's apple. There were moments when he would have enjoyed breaking Wildcat Gordon in two. This was one of the moments. Only Wildcat was not so easily broken in two.

"Commissioner Gordon!" raged Mayor Van Royston. "There are things to be explained! What about this Whisperer blowing up our State prison? What about this dead man in the river and—"

"I would suggest you go find the dead man in the river," cut in Wildcat. "You might call me from your office, mayor, after you've attended your usual pink tea and talked to the party committee. And now I have a visitor, so please—"

Deputy Henry Bolton's small eyes held murder. Mayor Van Royston's chin was pushed out so far it made him look much like a bantam rooster.

The visitor was none other than old Quick Trigger. The bald-headed former deputy grinned at the pair as they slammed from Wildcat's office.

"Dang it, Wildcat!" grunted Quick Trigger. "If this goes wrong, we'll land—"

"Be in a bowl of nice, hot gravy," finished Wildcat. "Well, what have you got on Mato and Yuli?"

Old Quick Trigger shook his head and looked mournful.

"Maybe we're off on the wrong foot, Wildcat," he stated. "All the records show that Mato and Yuli have been nice, little boys ever since the rest of the Satanic Seven went to the big house. Wasn't able to put my finger on them, because they left a rooming house at 600 De Soto Street about three weeks ago and didn't leave any forwarding address."

Wildcat frowned heavily.

"Two nice, little boys on the records can raise a lot of hell when they've been out of touch for three weeks," he said. "So they left no forwarding addresses. About the other—?"

Old Quick Trigger mopped his bald forehead.

"Whole sixteenth floor of the Barkley Block is occupied by Weymouth & Weymouth, diamond cutters and jewelers," he said. "They have depositories for customers' gems in large amounts. A girl named Nell Arthurs is in charge of the deposit—"

"Hellamighty!" exploded Wildcat. "That's enough! That bait we laid up above has been in all the headlines! Danvers, Baylor and that crowd believe that Godfrey Yodens is still alive, even if they have got a large chunk of his hide!"

Wildcat was pressing a button. The man who came in had gray eyes, a square chin and a face as emotionless as if it had been carved out of wood—the wood of some old battleship. He was Detective Sergeant Thorsen.

SERGEANT THORSEN had once been a sergeant in the Army. Had he been ordered to take off his shoes and wade in one of the park pools, and that order had been delivered by Wildcat Gordon, Sergeant Thorsen would have said, "Yes, sir!" then he would have removed his shoes and waded in one of the park pools.

In numerous altercations with Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Bolton, Sergeant Thorsen had become Wildcat's most dependable man.

"Sergeant Thorsen, you will throw a dozen of your best men into the Barkley Block at once," said Wildcat. "Make your stakeout as unobtrusive as possible. Before you go, check with the mugs in the gallery under the general listing 'The Satanic Seven.' You will recall, perhaps, that five of these are the racketeers who broke from Graywall last night. The others are Mato and Yuli."

"Yes, sir," replied Sergeant Thorsen, without batting an eye.

"And there is a girl in the Weymouth & Weymouth outfit I especially want kept under observation, not only in the offices, but all of the time on the outside," added Wildcat. "She is Nell Arthurs."

The Texas eyes held a hard twinkle.

"And don't be surprised if you happen to pick up the tattooed skin from off a man's breast, sergeant," he said.

"Yes, sir!" said Sergeant Thorsen, without emotion.

"I want that tattooed skin, Sergeant Thorsen, but don't let anyone get hurt. Understand?"

"Yes, sir!" said Sergeant Thorsen.

He pivoted and walked from the office, as calmly as if picking up a piece of tattooed skin was all in a day's work. Wildcat glanced at his wristwatch.

"Call Tiny, Quick Trigger, and tell her I want her to accept a job as stenographer with Weymouth & Weymouth. I'll make the arrangements."

But Tiny Traeger, the pretty, blue-eyed granddaughter of Quick Trigger, was not destined to become a stenographer in the offices of Weymouth & Weymouth.

It was now close to eleven o'clock in the morning. Wildcat had judged shrewdly that if anything were to happen today, it would be during the noon hour, or possibly at closing time. He had expected the fear of Godfrey Yodens to bring quick action.

Unfortunately, the action came too quickly.

CHAPTER VI
THE STRANGLED GIRL

WITHIN twenty minutes after Wildcat Gordon had issued his order, Detective Sergeant Thorsen was trickling the first of his men into the Barkley Block. By the simple mischance of timing, at the moment Wildcat had issued his instructions, seven well-dressed men appeared on the sixteenth floor of the Barkley Block.

Two of these men came from a front stairway, and another pair up rear steps. Three ascended in the three elevators serving the building. The janitor on the floor, if he had noticed, would not have detected anything unusual in these seven arrivals within the same five minutes.

As usual with important concerns, the sign on the door of Weymouth & Weymouth, diamond cutters and jewelers, was inconspicuous. The seven

well-dressed men had entered a small reception room with well-planned movements. The outer office was occupied by a single office boy and the girl at the telephone switchboard.

The pretty girl at the switchboard looked up with a smile. But something in the narrowed eyes of the seven sleek visitors must have warned her. One shapely hand snapped to one of the cords.

"Hold it, sister!" grated a low, hard voice. "We'll do all the talking for a few minutes!"

He was over the low rail. One hand gripped the girl's wrist and the other clamped tightly over her mouth as a scream started. The freckle-faced office boy came out of a half doze at that, sprang for a door marked "James Weymouth, Private."

A man near the rail raised one hand barely to his waistline. Smoke spurted out with a spiteful snapping. The bullet from the silenced pistol dropped the office boy to the floor, his eyes filled with the surprise of death caused by a hole at the base of his brain.

Convulsive movement alone caused the office boy's hand to smack into the glass of the door marked private. The glass splintered and shivered down upon the body. A second man now was binding the phone girl swiftly with tape, shutting off her cries and movements. Another man who seemed familiar with the job slipped into the switchboard chair as the girl was eased to the floor.

A TALL man with gray hair at his temples and a finely modeled face opened the private door, his eyes widening at the sight of the dead boy on the floor. He attempted a quick movement, but a man stepped from beside the switchboard and pushed a pistol hard into his stomach.

"Turn around and face the wall! Let out one squawk and that will be your last!"

James Weymouth was swung with his face to the wall. He attempted to speak and the butt of a gun rapped sharply across his head.

At that instant another man, whose appearance proved him to be the brother of James Weymouth, stepped through the outside doors. He was Harrison Weymouth, the other member of the firm. Before he could speak or move, the cold muzzle of a gun was pushed into his throat:

Two of the seven men then remained outside while five went on into the inner offices.

Weymouth & Weymouth employed many persons, but only a few were connected with the office department. Thus it happened that Mr. Hoker, a bookkeeper, and Mr. Campbell, the cashier, were the next two persons to see the holdup bandits. Their glimpses were brief, because the five men worked with machinelike precision.

For the space of a few seconds, Hoker and Campbell were held speechless by the guns in the hands of the visitors. Then both employees were neatly "sapped" with blackjacks and left unconscious.

The five invaders faced a wide, low door marked "Deposits."

The door opened and a white-faced young woman stood there.

Though her face was white, the young woman was cool enough. She held a small revolver with a steady hand. Only after she saw she was outnumbered five to one, did she permit the weapon to drop down.

Still she said, "What is it you want?"

One man of the five pulled some ghastly object from an inner pocket. As it spread in his hands, it could be seen that it was a patch of human skin with irregular edges.

"If you're Nell Arthurs, you'll know what we want!" grated the man with the skin harshly.

This man had a high, peaked forehead, a narrow face and thin lips that gave him the appearance of some rodent.

The girl called Nell Arthurs first jammed the back of one hand over her mouth to repress a cry of horror. The man nearest her undoubtedly expected a scream. He caught her with rough hands, a palm over her mouth snapping the girl's head back.

"Easy, Danvers!" snapped the voice of the leader. "We don't want her hurt, just yet! Get her into the deposit room!"

A side door opened. It was filled with the bulk of two men, the square cut of their shoes suggesting they were from the police. Detectives Tom Corcoran and Rin Howard were the first of Sergeant Thorsen's squad to reach the sixteenth floor.

A slight error in time had put them into the Weymouth & Weymouth offices several minutes ahead of others of their squad. They had entered from a side door, unfortunately missing the small reception room.

The detectives had heard the commands and the blows that had subdued Hoker, the clerk, and Campbell, the cashier. Their guns were in their hands. But they had no means of knowing the number in the room.

Though the police guns instantly covered the men holding Nell Arthurs at the inside doorway and they rapped out commands, they could not beat the bullets from two silenced rods. Neither detective fired a shot.

Corcoran took a slug across his forehead, stunning and blinding him temporarily. He fell too quickly to see his partner, Rin Howard, drop to the floor with a small hole back of his left ear.

"Tricked!" snarled the rat-faced leader. "The cops! I don't know how, but it's a trap! Bring that dame back in here! The rest of you get going!"

THE immediate happenings in that back room were what might have been expected from desperate, hard-banded crooks. Detective Sergeant Thorsen and the others of his picked squad did not reach the sixteenth floor in time to prevent the tragedy.

Nor could any of the detectives have told where they had passed and missed the members of the Satanic Seven as they escaped from the offices of Weymouth & Weymouth and made their way from the Barkley Block.

A slow, terrible oath broke from Sergeant Thorsen's lips, one of his rare expressions of emotion, when his squad came upon three dead persons, four others knocked out and the telephone girl bound and gagged on the floor.

Detective Tom Corcoran was just coming to himself. He was grinding his knuckles across the bullet crease in his forehead, getting the blood out of his eyes.

Detective Rin Howard had no blood upon him, for a direct bullet behind the ear does not bring blood. Rin Howard had died instantly.

"In there, sergeant," said Corcoran slowly. "A girl—they'd grabbed her—it was them—the seven mugs we saw this morning—"

The girl, Nell Arthurs, with her surprised, brown eyes, still open, was lying in front of a long row of locked deposit boxes. Two of these boxes had been opened by force. Some jewelry in settings had been spilled out. It seemed probable that the Satanic Seven had taken other gems.

It was then that the slow, terrible oath came from Sergeant Thorsen; Nell Arthurs had been choked to death. The cruel imprint of fingers had broken the skin under the girl's ear. James and Harrison Weymouth had been dropped by revolver butts beside the dead office boy and the bound telephone girl.

As Sergeant Thorsen's men broke in, a dozen or more other employees surged through the doors leading from other departments. Thorsen checked them and prevented their entering.

He was only a minute or two establishing the fact that they had missed hearing the silenced rods of the invaders and that none but those still unconscious had seen the faces of the killers.

Sergeant Thorsen learned quickly the dead girl, who had without doubt been tortured, was the same Nell Arthurs he had been instructed to place under supervision. Too late for that now, forever too late.

The wounded Tom Corcoran said, "I could identify at least three faces I saw just before one of the rats put me out. They are the same mugs the commissioner had us give the once-over."

Sergeant Thorsen touched the dead girl only to establish that her pulse no longer was beating, that there was no hope of saving her. He discovered then that the girl's arm had been twisted until the small bones above the wrist had snapped.

It was because of this that the face of Wildcat Gordon was set as his men never before had seen it when he reached the scene of the murders a few minutes later.

The Weymouth brothers were at this time reviving. The shivering, sobbing phone girl had been freed. Hoker, the clerk, and Campbell, the cashier, had been restored to their senses.

All those who had seen the killers swore they could identify them if they saw them again. Apparently there had been little effort to prevent their faces being seen.

Within half an hour, a checkup of the records definitely fixed the fingerprints on the throat of Nell Arthurs as those of Mato. Mato, one of the Satanic Seven, who with Yuli, another member, had disappeared from a disreputable rooming house at 600 De Soto Street three weeks before.

WILDCAT accompanied Quick Trigger back to headquarters. The old ex-deputy was silent for some time. He sat hunched in the seat of the coupé, and when he spoke it was with repeated emphasis.

"Reckon this puts us on the spot, Wildcat. Five of the Satanic Seven escape from Graywall, and it's laid to The Whisperer. Then, right under the noses of the police, all of the seven commit murder and robbery. It doesn't seem to leave any way out."

Wildcat's colorless eyes were like cold ice.

"There is a way out, Quick Trigger, but it's going to be tough. Don't forget, the Satanic Seven did not find what they were after."

"No," admitted Quick Trigger. "And neither of the Weymouth brothers seem to think they were looking for anything but jewelry in the boxes."

Wildcat Gordon had scarcely reached his office when the newspapers were screaming new headlines. In spite of all precautions, it had leaked out that the atrocious murders in the heart of the downtown district had been committed by the men who had escaped from Graywall.

Mayor Van Royston was in Wildcat's office. A general order had gone out to pick up any of the seven members of the Satanic Seven. The mayor had for once passed up attending a public reception.

"Commissioner Gordon," stated the mayor, "the governor himself has appealed to the Reform Party committee for an immediate inquiry into your own report in connection with the escape at Graywall Prison. What have you to say?"

"Nothing!" snapped Wildcat. "I suppose you would like to have me give out the usual statement to the press that the killers will be rounded up within a few hours."

"As if that would mean anything, Commissioner!" sneered Mayor Van Royston.

"Exactly! It doesn't mean a damned thing! It will be a surprise if anyone of the seven happens to be picked up! They never staged an open invasion like that with the intention of being found afterward! You have to remember that five of the gang know themselves to be fugitive convicts, so they must have been fairly secure in planning what their getaway would be!"

"And you know what that means for your job, Commissioner Gordon! You've employed your high-handed methods just once too often! You have been the indirect cause of many deaths and—"

"Don't overlook the governor's plan to help an insurance company," suggested Wildcat, in a suddenly mild tone. "We will—"

The phone buzzer sounded on Wildcat's desk. He ceased speaking to listen.

"Yuli?" he said. "Walked right into your hands? O.K., Treanor! Has an alibi, huh? Hold the line a minute!"

Wildcat turned to another phone.

"Give me Judge Patrick Kyley," he requested, then turned to Mayor Van Royston. "I want a few minutes private conversation, mayor, if you don't mind. For your information, Yuli, one of the Satanic Seven, has been picked up. I'm having him up for immediate arraignment. It is likely there is nothing on which he can be held."

"What? What?" gasped Mayor Van Royston. "One of the killers, and you say he can't be held? He'll have to be held!"

YULI was of the flashy, dark-skinned pattern. His name and appearance suggested he might have been anything. His white teeth flashed with a confident smile. Black eyes rolled beside a flat nose.

Less than half an hour after he had been picked up, and after Wildcat's phone conversation with Judge Patrick Kyley, Yuli stood before the bar in Judge Kyley's court.

CHAPTER VII
THE RELEASE OF YULI

"SMILES" ORSON, sleek proprietor of the Orson Nightclub, sat with four other well-dressed men on the witness bench in Judge Patrick Kyley's court. Neither Orson nor his companions made any effort to disguise the fact they had been drinking heavily.

Yuli himself was smirkingly intoxicated. His black eyes had a gleam of contempt for Judge Kyley. The pudgy, partly bald-headed judge had a reputation for being tough on crooks of the Yuli brand. At this moment, Judge Kyley wore what might have been mistaken for a benign smile.

Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Henry Bolton occupied seats in the room. Mayor Van Royston was watching for the appearance of Wildcat Gordon. But it was Detective Sergeant Thorsen who appeared to present the police .charge.

Judge Kyley was speaking.

"You admit, Sergeant Thorsen, this Barkley Block holdup took place at 11 A.M., and you request that the defendant known as Yuli be held for complicity in the robbery and murders."

"That's it," stated Sergeant Thorsen, a little uncertain for him.

"You think you have witnesses who could identify the defendant as being on the scene, Sergeant Thorsen?"

Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Bolton both let out grunts of disgust.

"Well, no, I couldn't be sure as to that," said Sergeant Thorsen.

An audible laugh came from Smiles Orson, of the nightclub. Judge Kyley rapped his gavel.

"This is a court, Mr. Orson," he admonished. "Now you and the four men with you are ready to swear that the defendant had been in your company at your nightclub continuously for the past twenty-four hours, having a party, as you call it?"

"Sure! Sure!" said Smiles Orson heartily. "Yuli couldn't have been within five miles of this blow-off the cops are talking about! The cops are always picking on—"

Judge Kyley's gavel rapped emphatically.

"That will be all, Mr. Orson. Five of you have sworn to the presence of the defendant elsewhere than at the scene of the crime. Sergeant Thorsen admits he has no witnesses who might establish otherwise. I have no alternative but to dismiss the defendant known as Yuli."

Mayor Van Royston reared to his feet, gulping.

"But, Judge Kyley! It's unheard of! You "can't release—"

The gavel hammered sharply.

"I regret to say, Mayor Van Royston, I can only make decisions upon evidence submitted," stated Judge Kyley. "I am conducting this court. The defendant stands dismissed."

Mayor Van Royston's power of speech seemed paralyzed. His mouth flopped open. Deputy Henry Bolton swore under his breath.

Yuli's white teeth gleamed in a smile, and his black eyes rolled. Accompanied by the swaggering Smiles Orson and four other alibi witnesses, the undisputed member of the Satanic Seven walked from the courtroom.

Mayor Van Royston started toward Judge Kyley's bench. The gavel smacked down and Judge Kyley said sharply, "Next case!"

HAVING been furnished police transportation to the court, Yuli and his companions hailed the

nearest taxicab. The driver was an oldish man, with a sprinkling of gray in his reddish hair. The taxicab moved directly away from the court, back in the direction of Smiles Orson's nightclub.

Inside the taxicab, Yuli grinned confidently beside Smiles Orson.

"Cops are all saps," said Yuli. "Alla them mugs in the Barkley Block was too scared to remember anybody. Even if they had, they've got too much sense to talk. I'm usin' a phone at the next corner."

None of the contemptuous passengers noticed the left-hand signal given by the reddish-haired old driver just before he drew up to the curb near a cigar store. Yuli descended from the cab and went inside. He passed into a public telephone booth.

Half a block away, another small car stopped. A figure in a gray suit, rather worn, with whitish hair and a limping walk emerged. He moved haltingly toward the cigar store. Before Yuli had ceased talking over the phone, this inconspicuous little man was buying some pipe tobacco.

As Yuli stepped from the store, the man in gray was stuffing tobacco into a stubby pipe. As the Yuli taxicab moved away, he entered the public phone booth. He had been in time to hear the dropping of several coins before Yuli had concluded his conversation.

The cigar clerk did not see the gray little man take odd dental plates from his mouth. It would have meant little to him that it was the cold, demanding voice of Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon going over the wire.

The response from the downtown telephone exchange was prompt. In fact, the long-distance supervisor had been advised an hour earlier to be ready for an instant report on all out-of-town calls.

"Right! Good work! The department will send you a box of candy!"

This was Wildcat Gordon's reply to the report he had received. His dental plates went back into place and it was the inconspicuous gray Whisperer who came from the phone booth. The Whisperer moved swiftly back to his coupé.

WITHIN perhaps ten minutes, Yuli and Smiles Orson, with the other alibi witnesses, descended from their taxicab in front of the place known as the Orson nightclub. There was the usual flow of traffic along the street.

"All cops are saps!" grinned the white-toothed Yuli, fingering a five-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Yes, sir," said the taxicab driver.

"Just for thinkin' the same way, you can keep the change, buddy!" said Yuli. "Come on, Smiles, this calls for a few drinks!"

Smiles Orson was talking to the other four men. A small coupé slid to the curb just behind the taxicab. Two other cars were discharging plainclothes men in the same block.

The chunky figure with the Army hat cocked over one eye was Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. Though his coupé had followed the taxicab, he had managed to change his attire to a loud blue suit, yellow shoes, with red necktie and carnation in place.

He swung suddenly in front of the white-toothed Yuli.

"So all cops are saps, are they, Yuli?" said Wildcat, cheerfully. "Well, just for that—"

Unless an observer had been close, he would not have seen the smashing fist that permanently removed Yuli's smile along with a section of his white teeth. A quick-voiced warning came from the hack driver, but it was not needed.

"So it's some plant!" yelled Smiles Orson, jumping and swinging for the back of Wildcat's head with a ringed hand.

The swing missed. One of Wildcat's yellow heels caught Smiles Orson just under a kneecap. An elbow ground into Orson's stomach. Two of the men with Orson and Yuli were pulling guns from their side pockets, but Wildcat whirled, smashed Orson full in the face, jerking Yuli toward him with the other hand.

"Don't do it, boys!" snapped Wildcat. "Some of my fellows are funny about finding women with broken arms! Take them, Thorsen!"

Yuli, Smiles Orson and the others found themselves ringed in by a dozen grim-faced detectives. There was a look on the faces of the cops that indicated they would take the greatest pleasure in having just one of these nice boys let go with a gun.

The old taxicab driver with the reddish hair had suddenly removed all but a couple of gray tufts over his ears. The sweating, bald pate of old Quick Trigger appeared.

"Guess we done rather good that time, Wildcat," he commented.

Yuli sputtered through the bloody space where his teeth had been.

"You can't take a man up twice after the court's turned him loose! You ain't got nothin' to hold us on! You can't produce any witnesses!"

YULI seemed to have been greatly mistaken. In less than half an hour, Judge Patrick Kyley had cleared his court of other cases.

"It was like we told you, judge," insisted Smiles Orson, who had one eye nearly closed. "We've been on a party, and the cops can't bring anyone to—"

"Keep quiet in my court!" thundered Judge Kyley. "Commissioner Gordon, produce your witnesses!"

Mayor Van Royston, again sitting in the back of the courtroom, was gasping. The witnesses were produced one after another.

Tom Corcoran, with a bandage across his head;

Hoker, the clerk; Campbell, the cashier; the switchboard girl who gave the name of Anna Stevens; James and Harrison Weymouth. The testimony of each was about the same.

There was now no smile on the face of the swarthy Yuli. His lips were puffed and swollen. Each and every witness pointed him out.

"He was one of the seven men," they said. "One of the Satanic Seven killers."

"I want to talk to my lawyer!" shouted Smiles Orson suddenly.

Wildcat Gordon had been watching closely. He had seen Yuli whisper to his chief alibi witness. Wildcat spoke a few quiet words to Judge Kyley.

"Sit down, Orson!" barked Judge Kyley. "You are merely a witness in this case!"

"Then Yuli is entitled to a lawyer!" yelled the nightclub proprietor. "I've heard of your damned ideas of running a court, and—"

None would have ever suspected pudgy Judge Patrick Kyley could move so fast. His voice rumbled, "This court's adjourned! Look out for the prisoner!"

Judge Kyley's plump figure bounded from his chair. Smiles Orson topped him by inches. The judge had to jump as his fist swung. But many years before, Judge Patrick Kyley had been a college boxing champion.

"So you don't like my damned ideas?" he shouted as Smiles Orson was lifted by a neat uppercut. "I said you were merely a witness!"

Smack! went a straight left-hand punch.

"Now you, Smiles Orson, and these other four rats with you are prisoners with the defendant!"

Smack! sounded the other fist.

"As soon as I resume court, I'm holding Yuli and the rest of you without bail on suspicion of murder and open perjury in my court!"

Smiles Orson was down. His face was beautifully raw. Judge Kyley's knuckles were bleeding as he resumed his chair and the gavel rapped.

A man came hurrying down the aisle. He carried a briefcase. He was Carter, one of the type of lawyers to whom crooks in a trap cry for help. Carter held up one hand.

"You can't do that, your honor! Smiles Orson is a client of mine! I request a conference before these men are held!"

WILDCAT spoke a few low words to Judge Kyley. Well enough, Wildcat knew that Yuli realized the trap into which he had walked by his long-distance telephone call. To permit Yuli or Smiles Orson or any of these men contact with the outside would mean an immediate swift warning to others of the Satanic Seven.

"For the present all communication with these prisoners is denied!" snapped Judge Kyley. "Bailiff, see that these five men are held for forty-eight hours incommunicado!"

Carter, the shyster lawyer, swore openly and said, "There isn't any court can—"

"Five days for contempt of court!" rapped out Judge Kyley. "Bailiff, you will see the commitment of Attorney Carter is carried out without recourse and that he is kept separate from the other prisoners!"

"Blazes!" gulped Mayor Van Royston in the back of the courtroom. "Between Wildcat Gordon and this Judge Kyley, what's justice coming to in our fair city?"

"That's what I've been thinking," agreed Deputy Henry Bolton. "No court can do things like that!"

The mayor apparently had forgotten it had been within the hour he had said the court could not dismiss Yuli.

The raging Attorney Carter, Yuli, Smiles Orson and the four other alibi witnesses were being led from the courtroom. Excited reporters were rushing to the telephones. Within half an hour, the latest explosion in Judge Patrick Kyley's court would be emblazoned in headlines.

Wildcat Gordon was issuing swift instructions. Early darkness was already engulfing the canyons of the city and lights were springing out.

Wildcat indicated James and Harrison Weymouth, the gray-haired brothers; Hoker, the clerk; Campbell, the cashier, and Anna Stevens, the telephone girl.

"Don't permit anyone of them to be unguarded for a minute," he directed. "Perhaps the other six of the Satanic Seven have made a getaway, but this Smiles Orson hookup proves they're not exactly playing a lone game."

"That's my idea, too, chief," agreed Sergeant Thorsen. "I'd ask if any of them want to be locked up for safekeeping."

None of the witnesses who had identified Yuli as one of the Satanic Seven desired the protection of a jail. James Weymouth, who had seen an office boy die at his feet, was especially bitter.

"Damn 'em! I'd like to have 'em come after me!"

Nevertheless, when James Weymouth drove away from Judge Kyley's court building, his big car was closely tailed by two detectives. It was the hour in the evening when downtown traffic, especially near the bridge crossings, was heavy.

BACK at headquarters, Wildcat received a report from Sergeant Thorsen that all of the witnesses were well covered. Mayor Van Royston was strutting up and down the office.

"I've had word from the governor," stated the mayor, "and he greatly disapproves of the action today in Judge Kyley's court. It's too much like compounding a felony for a judge to release a suspect

temporarily when he knows there are witnesses against him."

Wildcat slanted an eye at the mayor over the toes of his shoes, reposing as usual on his desk. He tamped some tobacco into his stubby pipe and sent up a little cloud.

"Sometimes governors and others can be too particular about legal technicalities," he stated mildly. "In the meantime, the underworld can go right ahead and compound all kinds of hell."

Sergeant Thorsen returned from an outside office.

"Sorry, chief," he said. "But the two men on James Weymouth lost his car in a traffic jam. Now they find his country address has been changed and they have called in asking for the file here." Wildcat Gordon's feet hit the floor.

CHAPTER VIII
THE FIRST MURDERED WITNESS

JAMES WEYMOUTH had armed himself with a revolver. He drove alone in his car across the four-lane bridge.

"If the cops would only let me get in on this," he murmured. "I'd like nothing better than to meet up with some of those cutthroats. But I guess it's no use."

James Weymouth had been watching the detectives' car that had followed him closely from Judge Kyley's court. He swung down off the four-lane bridge and headed along the parkway that led to his new house in the suburbs. As he entered the parkway, there was a five-minute jam while traffic men helped remove a disabled car.

Perhaps two miles from the bridge, James Weymouth again picked up headlights that held steadily about one hundred yards behind him. He had always been a diamond merchant, never an adventurous man. Somehow, he now had the feeling he would like to have a personal hand in this game of tracking down the Satanic Seven.

"I'll bet that smart Wildcat Gordon got a line on the other six, and that was why the court case was held up," said James Weymouth to himself. "Perhaps the detectives would tip me off to something. I'll have a word with them, anyway, because they'll have the neighbors wondering if they're going to stand guard."

James Weymouth turned his car from the speedy parkway at Grove Avenue and turned up the half-mile hill to his residence. He grinned as he noticed the same pair of headlights had also turned off and that the car was coming up the hill. He decided to have a word with the detectives before he reached his own residence, so he pulled over to one side.

James Weymouth extended one hand. The car behind him slowed down abruptly, then came on. It was stopped a little off the road, directly behind his car. James Weymouth climbed from behind the wheel.

Two men got out of the car that had been following. At least, James Weymouth saw two men walking toward him.

He said, "Hello, fellows! Just wanted to have a word with you!"

"That'll be just swell!" snarled one of the men suddenly. "O.K., Toroni!"

James Weymouth made a belated effort to draw his revolver. But he was not accustomed to the use of such weapons. A fist driven by a long arm smashed into his face. Perhaps it was the barrel of a pistol that sent him into the middle of the road.

What happened after that, James Weymouth never knew.

OLD Quick Trigger was seated beside Wildcat Gordon in the fast police coupé. Wildcat had whirled the small car from the speedway at Grove Avenue. He had been several minutes at headquarters checking with Harrison Weymouth on his brother's address.

As the coupé came up from the parkway and the huge, gray stucco house in the trees appeared, Quick Trigger said, "Guess everything's all right, Wildcat. There a light downstairs and another one in the garage."

"It had better be all right!" gritted Wildcat.

James Weymouth's garage was a two-car space built into the concrete foundation of the house. The doors were closed, and the light in the house indicated it might be in the kitchen.

As Wildcat sprang from the coupé, a small, expensive car drove up and a handsome woman got out. She came hurrying over and said, "What is it, please? Were you looking for the Weymouths? I'm Mrs. Weymouth."

Wildcat said, "We just wanted to speak to your husband for a moment, Mrs. Weymouth, if you will call him."

It was apparent the woman had been shopping, for her small car was filled with bundles. She went up the steps and pressed the button. Wildcat was close behind her.

She said, "That's strange, Sam is always quick to answer."

Wildcat took some bundles as Mrs. Weymouth got out her key. She opened the door and said, "Wait a minute. I'll call Sam from the kitchen. Perhaps Mr. Weymouth has not returned yet. That terrible trouble this morning might have delayed him."

"I know," said Wildcat grimly.

The slender, handsome woman walked along a short passage and opened a door. The light from the kitchen shot out. Mrs. Weymouth screamed shrilly once.

"Sam! Why, Sam!"

The woman mercifully fainted, and Wildcat dropped the bundles and caught her. He eased her to the floor and got into the kitchen. Sam was a Chinaman. He had died from the effect of a blow so brutal that it had almost obliterated his nose. The Chinaman's dead eyes stuck out queerly.

Old Quick Trigger had heard the woman's scream. He was beside Wildcat as the latter sprang through a half-opened door through which a light streamed up from the James Weymouth garage.

"Get those outside doors open, Quick Trigger!"

Wildcat was beside the door of James Weymouth's big car. At first, it seemed that the jeweler had driven his car into the garage and remained at the wheel, for he was sitting rigidly upright. Then Wildcat emitted an oath.

The motor of the big car was still running. Wildcat turned it off. James Weymouth sat upright at the wheel because long strips of tape had been used to bind his body in that position. There was a bruise over the dead man's eyes, but it had not been sufficient to cause death.

James Weymouth had died of carbon monoxide poison from his motor. Perhaps his murderers had been interrupted by Sam, the Chinese servant.

Wildcat sent Quick Trigger back upstairs to call headquarters and to get a doctor for Mrs. Weymouth. The ex-Army officer stood in the garage for a few minutes looking at James Weymouth's body. His hands slowly clenched and his knuckles whitened.

"One murdered witness," he said, in a musing tone, "and we have no case. It has always been that way. So that was what Yuli was telephoning to Mato about. Well, we are going to have a new deal in murdered witnesses this time. That phone message was a mistake."

When the homicide squad had arrived and Mrs. Weymouth had been given care, Sergeant Thorsen turned to make a report to Wildcat, who had been standing near him. A slow grin came over Thorsen's wooden face.

Wildcat Gordon had disappeared.

JAMES WEYMOUTH, No. 1 witness against Yuli, of the Satanic Seven, was dead. Wildcat Gordon had mysteriously vanished from the scene of the murder.

Within an hour a fast, little car slid with darkened headlights alongside a high fence. It might have been noted that this fence was of new boards that had not yet been painted.

A figure, a blur of gray hardly to be detected in the night, emerged from the small coupé. The Whisperer surveyed his surroundings carefully before he ascended the newly built fence. Then he dropped to the grounds inside.

Porches guarded with heavy wire surrounded each of the four floors of one building. Lights still burned in all of the rooms, of which there must have been more than a hundred.

The Whisperer swiftly climbed a spreading maple tree near the side of the building. He swung from a branch to the roof above the top porch. From this position, he had a clear view of several rooms. By shifting from one spot to another, The Whisperer passed from the fourth to the third floor.

The wire screening of this porch was heavy. It was intended to resist the strength of an average man. The Whisperer slipped a small pair of wire cutters from a pocket, snicked a small space, then applied his hands. Within seconds, he was on the porch and crouched under a window.

There were two men inside the room. Somewhere in the building a bell struck. One of the men inside the room swore heavily and the light in the room went out.

The Whisperer employed infinite caution cutting the window wire. He ripped it away slowly, noiselessly. He was inside the room, standing between two cots which could not be seen in the darkness.

Suddenly one of the cots creaked. A voice said, "You hear something, Danvers?"

Danvers made no reply, and the question was not repeated. The Whisperer smashed down with a hand that contained a reversed pistol. The other cot creaked. A weird, penetrating whisper spoke.

"Stay where you are! Your time has come!"

No doubt, a squawk started in the other man's throat. It was never completed.

Two minutes later, The Whisperer crossed the wired-in porch. He pushed a limp body through and permitted it to drop to the ground below. The Whisperer followed cautiously, lifted the sacklike object over one shoulder and went toward the unpainted fence.

In a short time the still darkened coupé moved back down the highway. Its headlights were turned on when it had passed from view of the building with the newly boarded fence.

SHORTLY after the hour of midnight, Wildcat Gordon drove his coupé into the lower part of a loft building warehouse near the waterfront. Lights glowed in the windows of a penthouse ten stories up on the roof of the loft building.

Wildcat entered an automatic elevator. He stepped out in a hallway along which came the fragrant aroma of hot coffee.

Old Quick Trigger came from a door and said, "Reckon you didn't do anything rash, Wildcat?"

"I think what the underworld needs is a little more of an eye for an eye," said Wildcat mysteriously.

"Dang it all, I might've known it!" groaned Quick Trigger.

"Humph!" came a musical voice from the end of the hallway. "I suppose it's some of your women fans again, Wildcat! Keeping a girl up to all hours so you can have your coffee!"

"I'll never know why the women take to me the way they do," grinned Wildcat. "I'll be having my coffee in a minute, sweetheart."

"Sweetheart!" exclaimed the girl, in high scorn.

She was Tiny Traeger. Her curling, black hair surrounded startling blue eyes. She had a doll-like, exquisite figure. The scorn in her exclamation was too artificial to be real.

Tiny Traeger had been in love with Wildcat Gordon since she was in the grade schools. The hard-boiled Wildcat looked upon her as merely a child. Only old Quick Traeger knew and appreciated the truth. He hoped some day Wildcat would discover that Tiny had become a woman and there never would be any other man but Wildcat.

Wildcat passed on into his own rooms. He had resided here in old Quick Trigger's penthouse for several years. His rooms contained a few mysteries which had enabled him to preserve his strange double identity. Not even Tiny Traeger knew that Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer.

There was no doubt that Detective Sergeant Thorsen suspected this second identity, but wild horses could not have pulled information from that wooden-faced detective.

Wildcat closed the door to his rooms and went directly to the telephone. He got headquarters and asked for Deputy Henry Bolton. It was necessary to make a connection with Deputy Bolton's home. Wildcat grinned all the way across his broad mouth at Bolton's surly tone.

"I have left two patrolmen on guard at James Weymouth's garage," said Wildcat. "I want you to personally make some further investigation. The weapon with which the Chinaman, Sam, was killed was not found. It may be in the garage and there may be fingerprints."

"But it's midnight and I'm at home!" snapped Deputy Bolton.

"That's why I called you," said Wildcat quietly. "You are nearer James Weymouth's place than any of the boys downtown. I've got a hunch there may be something we've overlooked."

Whereupon Wildcat gently replaced the phone and went out to the kitchen for his coffee. He put his feet on a corner of the table, and Tiny indignantly pushed them to the floor. It was a customary procedure and Wildcat grinned at her.

IN the meantime, the angry Henry Bolton, accompanied by two men, reached James Weymouth's place. Their car horn failed to bring forth the pair of patrolmen who had been left on guard. Deputy Bolton lumbered from the car, swearing.

Two minutes later, Deputy Bolton and the men with him were slapping cold water into the faces of two dazed coppers. Each patrolman had a slight bruise on his head, but neither knew what had hit him.

One of the detectives said, "Listen! Isn't that a car running in the garage?"

Deputy Bolton led the others through the Weymouth kitchen into the built-in garage.

"Living hell!" exploded one of the dicks. "Another one!"

A man was sitting stiffly upright at the wheel of James Weymouth's car. He was very dead. When the place was cleared of the deadly monoxide fumes, it was discovered that the corpse was expertly taped to the steering wheel.

A paper pinned to his shirt read, "An eye for an eye."

One of the detectives with Deputy Bolton had been with the squad sent to the Barkley Block.

"What a break!" he said. "The nice boys of the Satanic Seven seem to have split up! Our dead friend in the car is nobody but Danvers! And he's one of the five that came out of Graywall in that break! Now where do you suppose this hookup with The Whisperer could have got into this?"

One of the coppers who had been knocked out whistled through his teeth.

"That's it! That's exactly it! Just before I was sapped I heard a whispering voice! It said 'Keep quiet and you won't be hurt!'"

Oaths volleyed from Deputy Bolton. That long-nosed, beady-eyed official had a constant fly in his soup. Many times, he had imagined he had the notorious Whisperer on the run only to have that wily and violent terror of the underworld slip through his fingers.

"But why would they put this Danvers in James Weymouth's garage?" demanded Deputy Bolton. "What would The Whisperer be mixing in this for, anyway?"

One detective shot an amused glance at the deputy.

"I've never heard of any reason why The

Whisperer should get in on anything," he drawled. "But he does seem to get around."

A few minutes later, Deputy Bolton was passing the latest news along to Mayor Van Royston, completely upsetting his night's sleep. Mayor Van Royston in turn buzzed the telephone of Wildcat Gordon.

"This monkey business in Judge Kyley's court is responsible for all of this, Gordon!" the mayor shouted. "The Whisperer is heading this Satanic Seven and he's rubbed out one of his own men, Danvers!"

"So he left a note, 'an eye for an eye,' did he?" said Wildcat. "You know, Mayor Van Royston, I believe that idea might have saved the State many good witnesses, if it had been applied a long time ago."

He replaced the phone as the mayor's voice became incoherent.

CHAPTER IX
THE FLYING DEATH KNIFE

AS Wildcat Gordon turned from the phone, old Quick Trigger shook his head mournfully.

"I reckon, Wildcat, if I'd never made those fool dental plates, you might have been a different kind of police commissioner. So you've located this Satanic Seven at the Rayburn Asylum?"

"I might have been the kind of police commissioner the crooks like the best," said Wildcat. "Yes, Quick Trigger, our friend Danvers came from the Rayburn Asylum, and perhaps I should have clamped down sooner, but I'd probably have gotten no one."

"If they are there, Wildcat, why not ?"

Yuli's phone call today went to the Rayburn Asylum, all right, but the man he. talked to was named Charles Raymond, an assistant supervisor, and I was fairly sure most of the Satanic Seven would either be outside or so well hidden we couldn't get at them.

"The murder of James Weymouth proves some of the killers were not up there, and it was only by chance I happened onto the room where Danvers was staying as one of the inmates. In the morning, I'm going into all of it."

Wildcat Gordon directly, suspected that the Charles Raymond called by Yuli would turn out to be none other than the missing Mato. But he was sure that any quick move would permit Mato to warn others of the Satanic Seven, and he planned to strike by a more direct method than the extremely involved law.

Had Wildcat known what the next few hours would produce, he might have taken different action. But none could foresee another wholly unexpected tragedy: This was to be another murdered witness.

ANNA STEVENS, the telephone girl witness of the holdup, was a vivacious and pretty girl. Detective Jess Harbin was ,a good-looking, redheaded chap. Detective Harbin, with Detective Carson, had been assigned to look after the girl.

Jess Harbin found the girl pleasing, to the eye. The big redheaded detective discovered he had made somewhat of a hit with the girl. So, it happened that Detectives Harbin and Carson accompanied Anna Stevens to dinner in a neighborhood restaurant near her rooming house before escorting her home.

The dinner was a pleasant affair. Especially as it concerned the girl and Detective Harbin. It looked to Detective Carson as if his partner had been hooked at last.

Because of the dinner, the two detectives missed hearing about the murder of James Weymouth. The hour was later than it should have been when the police car pulled into the block of old brownstone fronts in which Anna Stevens boarded.

"I'll be seein' you to your door," offered Detective Harbin. "If anything happens, we'll be on the job down here, or maybe I'd better plant myself in the hallway near your room."

"Now that's an idea," said Anna Stevens.

"I'll be wantin' to know exactly where you are after this, anyway," suggested Harbin.

"That will be all right with me," smiled the girl.

"Good gosh!" growled Detective Carson, at the wheel of the police car. "This is turning out to be a tough case!"

"Well, not so tough," grinned Detective Harbin; starting across the deserted sidewalk, his big hand gripping the girl's right arm. "It wouldn't be so bad as a permanent assignment."

Meeting this pleasant redheaded officer had lessened much of the horror the telephone girl had witnessed that day. She laughed, lifting her face to look into the blue eyes of the detective.

Swish!

Detective Harbin probably heard only that, like the sudden flight of an arrow. Harbin was looking at the girl's smiling, red lips. No doubt, he had an idea about that, too.

The deadly, swishing sound caused the smile to freeze on Anna Stevens' lips. Possibly Harbin had time to see the glittering, pointed blade that plunged into the girl's white throat. Perhaps not. For Anna Stevens clutched at the steel biting into her flesh as a machine gun erupted from a cellar alcove near the door of the brownstone house.

Harbin held the girl, blood gushing over one arm as he tugged at his holstered gun. But Harbin failed to get his revolver into action. "Chopper" slugs cut across his face.

As Harbin fell, his knees buckling, Detective

Carson attempted to get his own gun into play. Bullets sprayed into the car and Carson slumped over the wheel, nicked across the skull and unconscious.

At the last, it seemed the pretty telephone girl must have lived the longest. One of her white hands feebly caressed the face of the already dead Detective Harbin. Then she died in his arms.

Two shadows, one tightly cloaked and slender, slipped away along the building fronts.

Witness No. 2 against Yuli, of the Satanic Seven, would never testify.

IT was only a few moments later when the voice of Mayor Van Royston was again babbling over the telephone to Wildcat Gordon.

"You've got to do something, Gordon!" the mayor shouted. "Another girl dead, and one of our men! There isn't a trace of the killers! Only that knife in the girl's throat! It is horrible!"

Grim-faced, Wildcat Gordon said, "Mayor Van Royston, it is horrible, I agree. We believed the girl and the others would be safe enough. Something will be done. Now let me talk to Sergeant Thorsen."

"But, Gordon," shouted the mayor, "something must be done—anything!"

"It'll be anything, I promise you that!" gritted Wildcat.

Perhaps the situation did not exist that would cause Sergeant Thorsen to lose his head. In calm, direct words, he gave Wildcat the details of the latest murders.

"That knife in the girl's throat was thrown," he stated. "It was one of those pointed blades with a weighted handle like they use in knife-throwing acts. Harbin was cut down apparently as he tried to shield the girl. Then a chopper bullet put Carson out of business."

Old Quick Trigger, at Wildcat's direction, was on the extension telephone. He interposed a question.

"Fingerprints on the knife, Thorsen?"

"None," stated Sergeant Thorsen. "The knife was undoubtedly thrown by the blade."

As the phone was replaced, old Quick Trigger rubbed a hand over his bald spot. His rather sunken eyes peered at Wildcat Gordon. The former deputy commissioner appeared as if he were trying to remember something.

Then he said, "Wildcat, I've got it! It goes back a long time, and I saw her face there at that house in 600 De Soto Street."

"Whose face?" grated Wildcat.

"Dead Shot Mollie," said Quick Trigger. "Damn, I should have thought of it sooner! Wildcat, Dead Shot Mollie was Mato's woman, but it was so long ago I had kind of forgotten. She was a knife thrower in one of the beach shows when Mato picked her up."

"She was at 600 De Soto Street? You saw her there, Quick Trigger? You're sure you weren't spotted when you found out Mato and Yuii had left there?"

"Not a chance," said Quick Trigger indignantly. "I don't stick my neck out when I'm looking for things. I talked with the mail carrier, and I saw Dead Shot Mollie cross the street and go into the house."

A minute later, Quick Trigger said, "I'm going with you, Wildcat."

"I can use a driver," agreed Wildcat.

ABOUT the time Wildcat Gordon and Quick Trigger were dropping down the automatic elevator from the penthouse, a party was in progress at the unsavory rooming house at 600 De Soto Street. The revelers were hitting it up in the three rooms of the basement in the tall building.

A copper walked past, but gave no attention to the squealing laughter of women and the profane voices of men. The lights were on in the rooming house basement, but the house was darkened above.

The patrolman shrugged his big shoulders and went on around the corner. Wild parties were too common in this tenement neighborhood to bring attention, unless the revelers started dumping each other into the street. The copper's lack of interest possibly saved him from serious trouble.

As the patrolman passed around the corner, a woman and a man came from a taxicab and walked across the street. The woman wore a raincoat. The man carried a violin case, or that was what it seemed to be.

The woman gave evidence of having imbibed a few too many drinks. She was laughing loudly and staggering.

The man said, "Shut up, Mollie! What the hell? Maybe you want to see your name in the headlines?"

"Wouldn't Mato like that!" said the woman. "You gotta hand it to me, Joey! I can still stick 'em!"

The man let out an oath and repeated, "Shut up! And don't go shootin' off your mouth!"

The man with the violin case rapped on the basement door at 600 De Soto Street. The door opened a few inches, then all the way.

The woman in the raincoat trailed into a big room, in which half a dozen men and women were trying to see how much they could drink before passing out.

"Gimme a drink, baby!" demanded the woman in the raincoat, grabbing a bottle from a man's hand.

The bottle was upturned and red liquor gurgled down the woman's throat. Perhaps it was needed to maintain the bravado since she had seen the red blood gurgle from another woman's throat.

The man set down his violin case carefully, pushing it behind a table.

"Whoopee!" screamed the raincoated woman, her face still pretty in a haggard, dissipated sort of way.

She jerked a long, pointed knife from bravado since she had seen the red blood under the raincoat. The deadly looking weapon was swiftly reversed in her hand. She sighted through the haze of smoke across the room at another woman who was standing close to the wall.

"No, Mollie! No!" this woman screamed, shrinking close to the wall. "When I stick 'em, they stay stuck!" cried "Dead Shot" Mollie. "Don't move, sweetheart!"

The pointed knife flicked from her hand—a hand that apparently had not lost its skill for all of her dissipation.

The other woman screamed as the steel sliced lightly through the lobe of one ear and thudded into the wall.

"Have a little drink on me, Joey!" said Dead Shot Mollie. "When you bust a dick with that chopper, he stays busted, Joey!"

The other frightened woman was wiping the blood from her sliced ear.

The basement lights went out. There were instant oaths, bedlam, that was just as quickly hushed for seconds.

"Stay where you are! I'll take things over! The first to move will die!"

IT was such a chilling whisper as might have come from the depths of hell itself. It penetrated to each person in that room, the eeriness of it more than the words conveying the threat of certain death.

"The Whisperer!" shouted a drunk.

There was a slight, grating sound, as if the knife were being pulled from the wall. Guided by this, a pair of drunken revelers got their guns into action. The explosions were terrific in the basement room.

The women cried out shrilly. Two men also cried out, and then there was a hissing like the slow escape of compressed air. Perhaps none heard the swishing of the knife hurtling across the room. A woman screamed now, once. It was the voice of Dead Shot Mollie. It sounded as if her cry had become tangled with rushing blood.

"The Whisperer! Everybody get out!"

This was the command of a man's voice. A table and some chairs were overturned. The glass of a window in the back of the room crashed out. No doubt much of the drunkenness of the preceding hours was given a quick and effective cure.

The lights did not come on. But had there been illumination, it might have been seen that all but two persons who belonged there had made their escape.

That weird, reaching whisper came again.

"Quick Trigger! Over here! All set ?"

"All set!" gritted the voice of old Quick Trigger.

There was a scuffling, dragging sound as if bodies were being moved. Other persons in the adjoining houses must have been on the telephones. Police sirens started their screaming song in adjacent blocks.

Before the first squad car arrived, a small coupé rounded a corner in fast second speed and its tires squealed.

Many persons who did not desire any personal contact with the police carefully refrained from appearing. The squad men found only the havoc that might have followed a row at a wild party.

There was an unusual amount of blood at one place on the floor. It formed a pool where Dead Shot Mollie and the fellow named "Joey" had stood.

CHAPTER X
A JUDGE IS KIDNAPPED

TWO brawny patrolmen pounded their heels into the block of brownstone houses. Scarcely more than an hour before, a pretty girl who had won the admiration of a redheaded detective had been found dead in his arms in front of a house near the middle of the block.

The patrolmen somehow found themselves talking in a lower tone as they neared this spot. Detective Harbin had been a popular fellow. Both of these coppers had been present and seen the knife in the dead girl's throat.

Owing to scanty lighting, shadows fell across the sidewalk. Where they touched the brownstone walls, they suggested sinister moving figures. One patrolman almost subconsciously tightened his fingers on the butt of his revolver.

A startled oath jerked from the copper's lips. His gun came into his hand and he swung his partner to one side.

"Look out, Jim! You see 'em, too?"

"Hell! How could I help it?"

Both coppers crouched close to the wall. The shadows cast by the street lamp looked as if hovering black ghosts were gliding by on the wind. The light fell upon *two* faces—the face of a man and the face of a woman.

A knife was stuck in the woman's throat. It was in exactly the spot where the throat of the pretty phone girl had been slashed. The arms of the man were around the woman.

Bullets had torn away part of the man's head. The patrolmen had a certain amount of superstition, for it seemed to them as if that girl witness, Anna Stevens, and Detective Harbin had returned to their rendezvous with death.

The coppers shivered and moved closer. Then the light showed this woman was another person. The man was not redheaded, though drying blood had matted his black scalp.

"Look, a chopper!" said one patrolman.

Beside the man lay an opened violin case. The metal of a machine gun gleamed dully. One copper blew his whistle shrilly, and the other cut loose three quick shots from his gun.

Less than ten minutes later, Detective Sergeant Thorsen was taking a white scrap of paper from the hand of the dead woman.

"An eye for an eye," was all the paper said.

WITHIN an hour, Wildcat Gordon was sitting in his chair at headquarters. A cloud of smoke arose from his stubby pipe. Of all those in his office, he appeared to be the least perturbed. His cold, colorless eyes followed the ceaseless pacing of Mayor Van Royston.

Wildcat had been in Quick Trigger's penthouse when word of the latest amazing killings had reached him. Quick Trigger had accompanied him to headquarters. Deputy Henry Bolton had been issuing orders for a roundup that took in one whole section of the city but, queerly enough, there had been no connection made between the deaths of Dead Shot Mollie and Joey, and the wild party row at 600 De Soto Street.

Wildcat was thinking, "If those who left that party are in on the activities of the Satanic Seven, then Mato must have been informed all about it by this time. That means I've got to start breaking the whole case, for Mato will realize his game is up."

"Commissioner Gordon," said Mayor Van Royston primly, "I have come to a decision: I believe the party committee will agree with me that a new commissioner is in order unless this wholesale slaughter is stopped. There is every evidence The Whisperer is responsible for some of these murders!"

Wildcat pulled a petal from a carnation in his coat lapel.

"I'd like to meet this Whisperer," stated Wildcat. "If he's hell bent on mopping up on the Satanic Seven who have been killing my men, I'd like to shake hands with him."

"What? What?" gulped Mayor Van Royston. "Henry, you hear that, from our commissioner?"

Deputy Bolton nodded glumly.

"I heard him say it," said Deputy Bolton dutifully.

"Shut up, Henry!" snapped Wildcat. "Mayor Van Royston, one of the reasons racketeering still survives in this city is because of the intimidation of witnesses! I greatly regret the rubbing out of James Weymouth, the little phone girl and Detective Harbin, but if these other killings are the work of The Whisperer, we ought to have him brought in and put at the head of a squad!"

"Great heavens, Gordon!" exploded the mayor. "Do you know what you're saying? Do you know what effect that would have on the party committee?"

"Sure, and I don't give a damn! The members of this police department seldom are in the dark as to who ordered the intimidation and the killing of witnesses! The newspapers know! It's common knowledge, yet an outfit of filthy, blathering, political shysters keep us tied up!

"If I had my way, it wouldn't be one, but three to one in dead mob rats for every murdered witness! Suppose you tell the party committee that, then get your new commissioner!"

Mayor Van Royston tried to put his retreating chin into line with his nose. He spread out his hands and appealed to Deputy Henry Bolton, but before he could speak, Wildcat's phone buzzed.

"That you, Wildcat?" boomed the voice of Judge Patrick Kyley. "Well, I'm getting ready to come to town! I've just had a phone message telling me that unless Yuli and his alibi witnesses are set free before noon today, I'll be no longer useful on the bench! Threatening me, Wildcat! You hear, so I'm going—"

"Hold everything, Patrick!" cut in Wildcat. "You got this message at your home in Ponto Hills?"

"Sure! Where else? So I'm putting my shotgun in my car—and I'm coming to town! I'll show these damned rats that—"

"Don't do it, Patrick!" snapped Wildcat. "It's a trick! You'll be—"

"I'll be nothing!" shouted the angered judge. "Let any of that scum try stopping me! Wait for me, Wildcat!"

"But, Patrick—"

The phone line was suddenly dead. An effort to call back got no response. Wildcat's feet hit the floor. His eyes flicked a signal to Quick Trigger. He ignored Mayor Van Royston's excited questioning.

Outside his office, Wildcat issued rapid instructions to Quick Trigger. The ex-deputy nodded.

"I'll be there on the job," he said. "But maybe then it will be too late."

"It still lacks four hours until daylight," said Wildcat. "One man can get through where a general alarm would do Judge Kyley no good. You know the right people to see, Quick Trigger, so be in the Rayburn Asylum grounds at daylight. Work it your own way."

FIVE minutes later, Wildcat's fastest coupé was shooting along a boulevard leading to the Ponto Hills highway. This same ribbon of concrete passed the Graywall Prison and the Rayburn Asylum.

Wildcat had decided the time had come to break the whole case, and clean out the Satanic Seven, if

Judge Kyley and others were to be saved. Direct descent upon the asylum in force might, or might not, trap Mato himself. Wildcat was certain it would not get four others of the killers.

Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo, four of those who had escaped from Graywall, were somewhere in hiding. Wildcat judged that because of the rapidity with which vengeance had been enacted for the murder of witnesses, these four at least would now be somewhere outside, prepared to strike.

Perhaps it was intended that Judge Patrick Kyley should be the next shining mark of the murderers.

Wildcat's fast coupé shot past the rambling structure of Graywall Prison. But it had now become the mysterious car of the terrible Whisperer flying through the night. A few lights glowed on the curving hill where the highway reached from the prison on the river back toward Ponto Hills and the exclusive country residence of Judge Patrick Kyley.

These latter lights marked the location of the Rayburn Asylum. Several times in the past few hours, The Whisperer had figured out the plotted escape of five of the Satanic Seven from Graywall. This Mato had been the leader of the Satanic Seven. Yuli had been his first lieutenant.

Crooks, racketeers, killers though they were, they had a political drag. The Whisperer thought bitterly how such pull kept the underworld alive, defiant of hard-fisted police authority. Mato would know his politicians.

Yuli had been tricked into calling a Charles Raymond at Rayburn Asylum. Thus The Whisperer had become sure that Mato held a minor official position at the asylum under that alias. No doubt, he had been there during the weeks that the explosion at Graywall Prison had been planned.

The slain Godfrey Yodens had admitted that he had been associated with Mato in the blasting of a bank vault, the stealing and the hiding of a million. But somewhere along the line, Godfrey Yodens had smartly secreted that million from Mato, from others who might have been involved.

Perhaps Mato had known that some mysterious key to the hiding place of the million was tattooed upon Yodens' breast. Then the five in prison had been watching Yodens, and it probably had been intended that he should escape during the explosion. Only chance had thrown Godfrey Yodens with The Whisperer at the moment of the blast.

Mato, working from the Rayburn Asylum, had the railroad auto car waiting and ready for his five companions. No doubt he expected them to bring Yodens with them, dead or alive. Once again chance had put Godfrey Yodens in Mato's hands, to die with the skin torn from his breast.

Being led to believe Yodens was alive by The Whisperer's own trick, the Satanic Seven had struck quickly at the offices of Weymouth & Weymouth. Only a few minutes too quickly for the trap set for them by Wildcat Gordon.

The disappearance of the fugitives had been simple: Mato, as Charles Raymond, had caused the asylum explosion and fire. Records were destroyed. Many inmates were killed or burned. In the confusion, five racketeer convicts had become mixed with the inmates.

THE WHISPERER was reviewing all of this rapidly as his coupé took the highway curve near the asylum at seventy. Suddenly, The Whisperer jammed on the brakes. Hand torches were being used by a group near the asylum entrance. Several men were gathered around a huddled lump on the ground:

The Whisperer parked his coupé and slid into the dark, gray mist. His figure was only a blur, its motion outside the rim of the light. The huddle on the ground was a man's body. His throat had been horribly slit.

A man wearing the uniform of a supervisor was speaking.

"Four men are missing," this man said. "We have not been able to straighten out identities since the fire. One man disappeared early tonight."

The Whisperer chuckled grimly. That one man must have been Danvers, who had been found stiffly dead in James Weymouth's car.

"The other four must have gotten out a little while ago," the man was saying. "Window screens were cut, ripped loose. We have no check on those who were in the panic during the fire. I cannot tell which four of the inmates are gone, only the total doesn't check."

The Whisperer was looking at a body under the lights. The dead man wore the uniform of a keeper. It was easy to judge this keeper must have somehow gotten in the way, suspected someone.

Another man spoke, and said, "You're having the grounds searched, Mr. Raymond?"

"Yes, thoroughly," was the reply.

The Whisperer had a glimpse of a peaked forehead, thin face, the tight mouth that gave the man the appearance of a rodent. So this was the missing Mato, undoubtedly the leader of the Satanic Seven.

The Whisperer remained a blur in the darkness. Another man said he had even investigated the big, white vault where several bodies of those who had died in the fire were awaiting identification or burial.

The outlines of this stone crypt in the hillside could be seen from the entrance gate. The Rayburn Asylum maintained its own burial ground for unfortunates without relatives. The white vault was a temporary repository now for bodies taken from the fire, awaiting possible identification.

The Whisperer might then have seized this Charles Raymond, supervisor, and accused him of being the infamous Mato. But by this time Judge Patrick Kyley would be leaving his Ponto Hills residence. And four men were missing from among the asylum inmates.

These could be none other than Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo.

The Whisperer was sure Judge Kyley's car had not passed him on the way to the city. He withdrew from the group around the murdered keeper. His coupé motor made no sound as the little car moved away.

The coupé took the final few miles up the Ponto Hills grades at reckless speed. The Whisperer passed no other car. He swung into the highway below Judge Kyley's country house. The doors of a garage had just opened. A long, sleek limousine was revealed. Judge Kyley had a colored chauffeur.

THE driver started the limousine from the curving driveway. The Whisperer was crouched in the shrubbery near the stone gate. He could make out the pudgy figure of the judge seated bolt upright in the rear seat. No doubt the enraged jurist had his shotgun ready at his side.

The big limousine purred from the gate into the highway. The Whisperer aimed one of his modern, silenced automatics. A rear tire of the car went out with a loud bang. A frightened squawk came from the colored chauffeur.

The pudgy Judge Kyley poured from a rear door, an automatic shotgun seeking a target. The movement of The Whisperer was like the swift striking of a hawk. One fist caught the colored driver at the right spot under the jaw.

Wham! blasted Judge Kyley's shotgun.

The Whisperer ducked and rolled as buckshot whistled close to him, screaming off the side of the limousine. Judge Kyley's shouted words were anything but judicial. They brought a chuckle from The Whisperer even as the second charge of buckshot splashed the ground near him.

But he was too fast for his good friend, Patrick. Before the judge could get the muzzle of the shotgun low enough to put in an effective blast, The Whisperer's arms were locked around the judge's knees.

"Be quiet and you won't be hurt!"

The Whisperer deliberately employed that awe-inspiring voice that hissed with menace. He desired Judge Kyley to hear it. Later, perhaps, another crime would be charged to The Whisperer: that of kidnapping the august person of Judge Patrick Kyley.

Then The Whisperer put Judge Kyley out as gently as possible.

CHAPTER XI
THE WHISPERER TRAPPED

THE WHISPERER worked in grim silence, but with speed. He sent his own coupé into the concealment of the nearest bushes off the road. The colored chauffeur was left securely taped and gagged in another spot.

It was impossible to determine whether the attack might come here or at some spot nearer the city. The Whisperer held the opinion that the crooks might do more than bring about the death of Judge Kyley. By torture or other means, they might attempt to free Yuli, Smiles Orson and the other prisoners now held in jail.

When Judge Kyley's big limousine moved again, the blown-out tire had been replaced. The judge himself was as helpless as a mummy in the rear seat. Tape closed his mouth and eyes, held his arms and legs.

The Whisperer placed one of his own guns conveniently at hand on the seat beside him. He planned swinging down the Ponto Hills road to a point near the Rayburn Asylum, then leaving the highway and using less-traveled county trails to reach the city.

The Whisperer's grim chuckle sounded as he thought of Judge Kyley's rage when he found himself in one of The Whisperer's unsavory, tenement hideouts. He thought that the judge's greatest danger then would be apoplexy.

The big limousine slid down the mountain grades

almost without sound. It was pure instinct that caused The Whisperer to jam his foot on the accelerator and shoot the judge's car ahead. An old car, of the touring type still to be found on some of the farms, came jamming out of a side road.

The headlights of this older car had been turned off. Only the beams from the limousine gave The Whisperer a glimpse of the men occupying the new arrival. The touring car barely missed ditching Judge Kyley's auto.

The flashing fingers of light revealed three men besides the driver of the touring car. The Whisperer instantly judged here was the trap. These men could be none other than Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo, the four missing men from the asylum.

They had been lying in wait for the judge's limousine. No doubt, they had seed: The Whisperer's coupé go up the hill, but had attached no importance to it.

The limousine leaped ahead, taking the curves at rocking speed. Guns racketed. Slugs pounded into the rear of the car. Driving with one hand, The Whisperer reached back and pulled Judge Kyley from the seat. The gurgling sounds he made as his pudgy body hit the floor were as significant as uttered oaths.

A rear tire of the limousine went out and the car swayed dangerously, but The Whisperer did not slacken speed. He was gaining on the older car when chopper slugs came all the way through and the windshield glass fell into a ragged arrangement.

The Whisperer did not feel the bullet furrowing into his right arm, but his hand suddenly was bloody and his fingers lost their grip on the wheel of the flying limousine. The pursuing car now was gaining, but was distanced by nearly a mile. Bullets had ceased to reach the limousine.

Just when The Whisperer was breathing a little easier, he saw fingers of light from another car coming up the hill highway toward him. The beams jumped around the shoulder of a steep grade so fast, it was necessary to squeeze the limousine dangerously close to the shoulder of the road.

The Whisperer swore hoarsely as the fenders of the two cars locked. A small car, a roadster, swung into the middle of the road, turning all the way around. The Whisperer was pitched against the door The door opened and he clawed with his left hand to save himself from going over a steep pitch of the rocky shoulder.

As the roadster stopped, a voice—that of a girl—cried out. The limousine headlights showed a vivid, pretty face framed by curling, black hair. The Whisperer was looking at Tiny Traeger. It was amazing, incredible that she should be here.

Yet, knowing Tiny, the fact she was following The Whisperer was not so mysterious. Having heard of the numerous killings, Tiny had contacted police headquarters. A somewhat dumb operator had given her the information that Wildcat had left suddenly to drive to the residence of Judge Patrick Kyley.

It was not the first time that Tiny Traeger had followed Wildcat when she believed him to be in danger. Still she did not know he was The Whisperer.

THE WHISPERER did not permit his amazement to interfere with what amounted to a miracle of thought and action. Keeping in the darkness, he pulled the dental plates from his mouth. He could hear the car of the Satanic Seven hammering down the grade not far above.

"You've no business here, Tiny," cracked the voice of Wildcat. "But now you can help! You've got your roadster turned around! I'm putting Judge Kyley in beside you! Don't wait! Drive like hell, straight to police headquarters!"

The Whisperer did not wait to hear Tiny's protest, nor did he permit her a glimpse of himself in the darkness.

His left hand struck with his padded blackjack and the much abused Judge Kyley passed out, probably to sleep for sometime to come. That strong left arm lifted the judge's weight and got the bound body into the seat beside Tiny.

"Get going!" snapped Wildcat's voice. "And don't stop this side of police headquarters for hell or high water!"

Tiny's roadster shot away. Bewildered as she might be, Tiny had lived long enough with a police system in her own home to ask no questions at a moment like this. As her car got into motion, The Whisperer was back in the seat of the limousine.

HE switched off all the lights. He put the big car in reverse and started backing it squarely across the road. The old touring machine was being driven recklessly. But the driver must have had some instinct that warned him at the sharp curve.

The old car was braked down, but it was not enough. Its hood plowed into the side of Judge Kyley's limousine, slamming it to one side. The Whisperer had not managed to get clear. His body was lifted and whirled into the air before he struck.

The breath was knocked out of The Whisperer and he was stunned, but he staggered to his feet with one of his silenced pistols in his unwounded left hand. The two cars were hopelessly wrecked. Four men were leaping into the darkness, away from the crack-up.

This was one of the few times The Whisperer was too dazed to be accurate in his shooting. Bullets whammed into the wreckage and air hissed

from the weapon in his hand. Then, suddenly, there was silence. Had he been fully conscious, normal, The Whisperer would have known this in itself was suspicious.

He walked into the space where the cars were reared up. The barrel of a gun crashed down on his skull and he fell in the road.

"That got him, Baylor!" said a harsh voice, but it came only vaguely to the paralyzed Whisperer.

An oath followed from another man who added, "It's the mug that was down in the big house and got away with Godfrey Yodens! The egg they call The Whisperer! Don't rub him out, Baylor! Maybe he found out from Yodens where the stuff is that matches that chunk of hide. We'd better let the boss have a look at him!"

Another voice said, "Either we'll burn it out of this mug, or we'll snatch that other Weymouth brother and make him be glad to talk about Yodens' cache!"

The voices of the four men seemed to be moving away. It was the consciousness of The Whisperer growing dimmer. He heard the threat stated that Judge Patrick Kyley would never reach his bench except to free Yuli, Smiles Orson and the other men.

THE WHISPERER was lying on hard concrete of the highway when he heard this last. The next thing he heard was a cricket chirping. The sharp, little sound impinged The Whisperer's nerves and for a few seconds it seemed as if his head was bursting.

He was no longer lying upon hard concrete. Thick grass, wet with dew, had with its coldness helped to revive him. He attempted to move, but found his right arm almost useless. His sleeve was soaked with blood. There was no light nearby; then he saw the faint gleam of illumination from a building through thick maple trees.

It was The Whisperer's keen nose that finally informed him of his location. There was the pleasant odor of dew on new wood. Close by reared a high fence. The boards were fresh from the mill and unpainted.

The Whisperer now realized where he was. He had been left lying inside that new board fence that

had replaced the burned one at the Rayburn Asylum. From the small amount of dew that had touched his clothes, he was able to judge he had been lying there only a few minutes.

The Whisperer's brain reconstructed the last words he had heard. Four of the Satanic Seven had spoken of the boss. That would be Mato, this bogus Charles Raymond, supervisor at the asylum. They had said the boss would want to find out how much he knew of Godfrey Yodens' secret.

That meant his captors had brought him here, placed him inside the asylum fence and gone to seek Mato, the boss. At this instant there was no movement near, no voices. The Whisperer attempted to get to his feet and discovered he could not manage it.

The murmur of men's voices came, a rustling in the trees. Dried blood matted The Whisperer's right arm until it was useless. He swore as he noted the gray dawn already was beginning to streak the sky.

The Whisperer started crawling along the fence. He had ascertained that all his weapons had been taken. From the quick, confused dispute between the oncoming men, The Whisperer judged they had put him hastily inside the fence and were not quite sure of the spot.

He was given only this advantage. Movement gave him some strength. The men were moving toward the entrance gate to the asylum grounds. It was only logical he would be expected to attempt escape in that direction.

The Whisperer lifted his head until he could see the outlines of the white stone vault in which he had heard it stated several bodies of inmates who had died in the fire had been placed. They had been put there awaiting identification, or later burial.

The Whisperer could move faster now. He had reached the portion of the fence where it was unburned and painted red. Keeping close to this, he crawled through the grass, his odd dental plates tightly clenched on his other teeth against the pain of his wound.

Where would be the last place Mato and his unholy killers would think to look for him?

That tomb of the still unburied dead presented itself. While the living inmates of the asylum were now closely guarded, there was no reason to keep watch over these pitifully dead. There was an iron gate with bars in an arch at the front of the vault.

This gate had been closed by an iron hasp, with an old-fashioned padlock, both deeply rusted.

Mato and his aides could be heard swearing. They were moving toward the red fence.

"You damned bunglers!" came Mato's cutting voice. "You let this whispering mug get away! I can't keep you inside now, and I can't do anything to get you away until I find out what kind of hell this Judge Kyley is raising! Letting him get away!"

The Whisperer brought all his Army seasoning to bear on a single act. Against the pain of his wounded shoulders, he raised himself, inserting the fingers of his left hand behind the rusted hasp of the burial vault gate.

The padlock snapped open. The Whisperer slipped inside, fighting weak sickness as he managed to make the padlock look as if it might not have been disturbed. Mato and his men were coming closer. Tough as he was, The Whisperer had no relish for his position.

BLANKETED corpses lay in a row inside the vault. There must have been nearly a score of the burned and unidentified dead. Bodies that soon must be placed in the private burial ground. The Whisperer stretched himself among them.

As soon as Mato and the others had moved on, The Whisperer planned to make his way out. He would get to some nearby telephone. It would be but a matter of minutes then until he could arouse the nearest State police.

The hunt passed on. Mato's sharp voice was fading. Daylight was painting the iron gate of the tomb a dismal gray. The Whisperer started slowly toward the outside. Suddenly, he stiffened.

Mato and his four companions were returning toward the vault. Had they picked up his trail? The Whisperer looked about for a weapon, but there was none.

Mato's voice said, "And that's the only way out now! It will give us our last chance to strike at that Weymouth dump! We'll get that other brother!"

The Whisperer pulled the blanket of a corpse over him. He was lying close to the gate and he dared not move. To his amazement, it appeared that Mato had abandoned the hunt for him. His four companions were swearing low oaths.

The four men—Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo—walked into the vault, glancing about apprehensively. Mato barked a command, and the four lay down on the cold stones close to the iron gate. One man was so close that The Whisperer could have touched him.

Mato was closing the creaking, rusty gate.

"You're safe enough in there," he stated. "The first bodies are to be buried this morning. You couldn't make it a hundred yards down the highway in daylight. The truck that will come carries eight bodies, and I will be in charge of the first truck. The four of you will be put into the truck with four corpses. Wrap yourselves in blankets."

"I don't like it, boss, I don't like it," said one of the men hoarsely.

"You, Toroni, shouldn't be afraid of a few dead men!" snapped Mato. "There will be but one driver and a gravedigger with the burial truck. At the burial ground—unless you want to be boxed up—

you four will put the driver and the digger out of business. It must be made to look as if I'd been knocked out, too. One of you will then drive the burial truck to the car parked off the highway above the prison. I'll join you there."

The four men lying among the corpses murmured hoarse protest, but Mato was the boss. Mato added he would make sure of matching Yodens' skin this time and get at the hidden million.

Mato walked away. The four men murmured among themselves. Their opinion of their hiding place and Mato's scheme was low-voiced. Killers that they were, this charnel house was not greatly to their liking.

The four were heavily armed. The Whisperer was helpless. An amazing plan came to his mind. He must be one of the eight supposed corpses to be taken out in that first truckload. He thought grimly that his appearance now must be much that of a dead man.

He had another thought. Would old Quick Trigger be in the asylum grounds as he had been instructed?

CHAPTER XII
QUICK TRIGGER'S BRAIN

THE WHISPERER himself was wrapped in one of the blankets pulled from a corpse. He was almost tempted to arise suddenly in that blanket and confront the four crooks. He could imagine there would be such panic as they never before had experienced.

The four members of the Satanic Seven pulled blankets from the corpses with shuddering oaths. They were aware they must be wrapped in these when the truck arrived, or their trick would be lost.

The Whisperer lay listening for the first sound of the truck approaching. Then he realized it would be another two hours or more before the regular daily work of the asylum was taken up. These were probably the longest two hours of The Whisperer's whole life.

The Whisperer wondered what had happened to Tiny, on her way to police headquarters with the infuriated Judge Kyley. He could not repress an inward chuckle. He could picture Tiny being put

under arrest as a kidnapper, the abductor of Judge Kyley.

Then The Whisperer's thoughts grew more serious. He had overlooked how this would connect the girl with The Whisperer in the mind of the judge. He had no means of knowing that chance again had stepped into the abduction of the famous jurist.

Judge Patrick Kyley came to his senses with an aching head and the feeling he had been buried alive. But presently, he discovered he was rocking along in a car and, that he was seated, stiffly bound, beside the driver. There was the smell of early morning fog in the air.

Judge Kyley quickly realized that he was in some smaller car than his own. It was being driven at high speed along a highway. He would have been amazed could he have seen the remarkably pretty Tiny at the wheel.

The judge was smart, and he had plenty of nerve. The tape holding his wrists had worked slightly loose. Without appearing to have regained his senses, Judge Kyley worked slowly at the tape around his wrists. His hands came almost free. He could hear another car coming, meeting that in which he was riding.

Now Judge Kyley had every reason to believe he was riding with a dangerous, much wanted terror of the underworld and the police. He had no means of knowing his driver and captor was an exact hundred pounds of delightful womanhood.

With a car coming, he judged this was his best chance.

Judge Kyley heaved his pudgy body heavily against the driver. Tiny, taken by surprise, was torn loose from the wheel. She had been turning to one side to pass the oncoming car.

Rubber screamed on the concrete. The coupé headed for the ditch and Tiny's slight body flew into the road, fortunately, rolling and striking in such manner as to cause no serious injury.

Smash went the coupé across . the ditch, but did not turn over. The bound figure of Judge Kyley rolled out and hit the ground.. Mumbling sounds came from his taped mouth,

THERE was one man in the other car. His brakes ground and he leaped out. He ran to the girl in the highway just as she shook black curls from over astonished blue eyes.

"Well, dang my time!" shouted a querulous voice. "Tiny Traeger! What are you doin' hellin' around out here on this—"

"Never mind, Quick Trigger," interrupted Tiny quickly. "I've kidnapped Judge Kyley—maybe I've killed him—what am I going to do? I was running away with him in the car—"

"Hellamighty!" boomed Quick Trigger. "Kidnapped Judge Kyley? You gone crazy?"

Her grandfather had gathered Tiny into his arms, making sure she was not injured. Now he let out a sobbing oath and pushed the girl away.

"Kidnapped Judge Kyley?" he muttered, getting over to the wrecked coupé.

Judge Kyley may have been kidnapped, but he most certainly had not been murdered. His partly freed hands were clawing the tape off his mouth, and the language emitted hardly came under the heading of calm, judicial opinion.

Tiny was following Quick Trigger.

"It was Wildcat tied him up," she said, in a low voice. "Then Wildcat put him in my car. Right after I left, I heard two other cars crash. I wanted to go back, but Wildcat said to take Judge Kyley to headquarters. Quick Trigger, Wildcat's in serious trouble."

"You're tellin' me," muttered her grandfather.

Judge Kyley was attempting to get the tape off his eyes. He was having little success, but he was talking freely.

"Whoever you are," he grated, "did you get that Whisperer? It's him seized me, and I'll—"

Old Quick Trigger had more than one reason for his odd nickname. His brain was as quick as his hand had once been with a gun. He instantly divined all that had taken place and guessed Wildcat Gordon must be in the hands of the Satanic Seven. Yet Judge Kyley must not know who really had abducted him.

Quick Trigger got close to the judge and growled out in an unnatural tone.

"Let that tape over your eyes alone. I'll cut your legs free and you can start walking. Get to a telephone or a car and you'll be all right. Now get up and get going."

A knife in Quick Trigger's hand cut the judge's legs free. The jurist staggered to his feet.

"I'll get that damned Whisperer if it's my last act on Earth!" blazed the judge.

"It might be at that," growled Quick Trigger. "Now start walking and you'll be all right."

Judge Patrick Kyley may have been all right, but his language indicated he was far from it. He was clawing at the tape stuck in his bushy eyebrows and swearing as he went down the highway. Quick Trigger directed Tiny into his car, then got her coupé from across the ditch.

The two cars went up the road toward Rayburn Asylum. At the first intersecting highway, Quick Trigger halted.

"Now little Miss Interference," he said tartly, "you take that road and get home as quickly as possible! If it ever gets out that you kidnapped Judge Kyley, where would you be?"

"I want to go with you, to find Wildcat," insisted Tiny.

But Quick Trigger was inexorable. Tiny knew when to stop arguing.

IT was less than half an hour later when old Quick Trigger made his way into the grounds of Rayburn Asylum. Once many years before, when a deputy commissioner, he had done a big favor for the asylum board. He now had an order in his pocket that gave him a job on the asylum grounds, without question.

Since quitting the police, Quick Trigger had made his hobby a study of disguises. When he presented his order to the work superintendent of Rayburn Asylum, Quick Trigger was adorned with white whiskers and was wearing work-stained overalls.

Eight o'clock arrived and the daily work around the asylum grounds was begun. The work superintendent cast around and discovered Quick Trigger sitting by. He promptly issued an order for Quick Trigger to take along a pick and shovel and go with a truck getting ready to move out.

The truck driver was a "trustee" of the place, a colored man who was getting along in years. He mumbled to Quick Trigger he did not like this job. The truck was being sent to convey several corpses from the temporary vault to the asylum's private burial ground.

The supervisor known as Charles Raymond went along with the truck to direct the placing of some eight bodies in the rough boxes provided for such burials of unfortunates. This Charles Raymond might not have been so confident of his position had he been watching the apparently nearsighted eyes of the old, white-whiskered man beside the driver.

In fact, Raymond had considered it quite a break that a new workman was being sent along as gravedigger. But Quick Trigger's retentive mind was remembering the rodentlike face of Mato.

By good luck, he had been put upon a job that brought him in direct contact with the chief of the Satanic Seven. The burial job did not at the moment interest Quick Trigger. He had no inkling that five living men and three corpses were about to be placed in rough boxes, and that one of these living men was Wildcat Gordon, The Whisperer.

The colored driver went about helping with the placing of the bodies in the rough boxes with great reluctance. Strangely, Charles Raymond, the supervisor himself, lent a hand to this. He selected and *helped* lift the blanketed "corpses."

Quick Trigger got his first impression of something being wrong when he was helping lift one blanketed body. Quick Trigger was convinced the arm he was holding had moved slightly. He did not show by word or sign of his discovery, and the colored driver was helping with the next body.

Suddenly, Quick Trigger had an idea. Until this time he had not spoken. Now he said, "We're taking eight of them, boss?"

"That's it," growled Raymond.

Had another of the blankets moved slightly? Quick Trigger was sure that it had. Could it be The Whisperer was among the dead men in this vault?

Quick Trigger did not speak again as eight bodies were placed in the rough boxes and the lids were laid over them.

CHAPTER XIII
THE THIRD MURDERED WITNESS

ABOUT the time the weird loading of living men for corpses in the Rayburn Asylum truck was taking place, Harrison Weymouth stood in the inner office of his place on the sixteenth floor of the Barkley Block. He was alone in the huge expanse of the offices this morning. The murders of James Weymouth and Anna Stevens, with the other killings, had caused Harrison Weymouth to suspend all activities for the day.

Harrison Weymouth was gray-haired, tall and dignified. Lines of grief showed on his face, for his brother James had been very close to him. Now he walked into the room containing the deposit boxes. He stood motionless for a moment, thinking of the horrible fate that had overtaken Nell Arthurs, the deposit box clerk.

Harrison rubbed one gaunt hand across his forehead.

"The poor child," he said slowly. "If she had only told us. But no, after all, she could not talk about it. But what a place this was for the hiding of stolen valuables. Who would think to look here for the proceeds of crime, with all the millions in jewels in the other boxes?"

Harrison Weymouth was now fully aware that the descent upon his office had been for the purpose of finding something other than the regular deposits of his customers. Somewhere among the scores of boxes a million or more in bank cash and securities was concealed. But in which box would it be?

Plainly enough, the murderous Satanic Seven had missed what they were seeking. Torturing Nell Arthurs had not given them the information. Perhaps the throttling of the girl had been accidental.

Opening the desk of the dead girl, Harrison Weymouth produced a thick record book. His hands riffled many pages. Each notation of a deposit seemed to be in order. Suddenly, Weymouth's hand slipped to the back cover of the book. He let out a quick exclamation.

A thin, loose page had fallen out. The paper was transparent. It was covered with symbols that might have been done with inks of several colors, like those used in tattooing. Weymouth studied it in a puzzled manner.

He held it up to the light and looked at it from

various angles. After careful study, he decided the page contained a symbol, but only a part of it.

Weymouth glanced quickly at the rows of deposit boxes. They carried such designations as 567-U, each number being accompanied by a letter.

"That's it," muttered Weymouth. "It's part of the number of one of the boxes, but it is incomplete. It might be any one of a hundred. Now if there were another similar page to fit in, all of the designation would appear. What would Nell have been doing with such a mysterious symbol in her record book ?"

Harrison Weymouth had not been told of the tattooed symbol torn from the breast of the murdered Godfrey Yodens. There were likwise some other items that might have interested him. One of these was only a guess on the part of Wildcat Gordon.

Wildcat believed the dead Nell Arthurs to be really the daughter of Godfrey Yodens.

OF one truth, Harrison Weymouth was convinced: He judged this colored symbol page might have had significance in the holdup by the Satanic Seven. He riffled another page or two. The name of Godfrey Yodens leaped out at him. Under it was merely the notation, "See Symbol 76."

Weymouth looked at the transparent sheet. There was an almost invisible 76 in the corner. Weymouth was smart enough to see the connection of the name and the page with the Graywall Prison break and the escape of Godfrey Yodens. It must therefore be intimately related to the holdup of the Satanic Seven.

Weymouth could find no concealed tracing in the transparent symbol. Something was definitely missing. The jeweler judged here might be something definite to produce in Judge Kyley's court later in the day.

Weymouth's face was tightly drawn. This Yuli must be held. The other killers must be caught. And Weymouth knew at this moment that he would likely be the only witness with courage enough to be present in the court.

The murder of James Weymouth and the telephone girl had brought the usual result. Hoker, the clerk, and Campbell, the bookkeeper, had taken run-out powders. Their families reported each had gone away on a trip.

So there now was Harrison Weymouth as the one witness who had seen all the Satanic Seven. Detective Corcoran had glimpsed only two men before a bullet had blinded him.

Harrison Weymouth was folding the thin page to place it in his pocket. "This," he said to himself, "will give the court plenty on which to continue holding Yuli. Perhaps it will give a direct lead to the men associated with Godfrey Yodens or those who knew of his ill-gotten fortune."

Weymouth spoke these words slowly, aloud. They were the last he ever uttered. A spiteful snap came from the vicinity of the office doorway. It was like the breaking of a stick. One of two men pushed a smoking, silenced gun into one coat pocket.

The third witness against Yuli, the Satanic Seven, was dead.

The two men were youthful, slick-looking rats. This pair had been at the death party attended by Dead Shot Mollie and Joey. They were among a few mobsters the Satanic Seven had recruited as outside aides.

The killer paused only to snatch the transparent page from Harrison Weymouth's dead hand.

"This must be the key the boss was raving about," he said. "Well, Mato and the other boys will be on the job early this morning. Come on, Slim. "We'll go back down that inside stairway and miss the cop planted outside."

HARRISON WEYMOUTH sat motionless, his hands trailing. His head lay on the desk of the tortured and murdered Nell Arthurs. Blood oozed slowly from a hole in the back of his neck.

The killer of the third witness had said Mato and the boys would be on the job early this morning. At the moment this was spoken, Mato himself probably believed the same thing.

The rodent-faced Mato, acting as supervisor at the Rayburn Asylum, was then directing the unloading of eight long boxes from a small truck. The truck stood in the asylum burial ground, well out of view of all buildings, at the edge of thick woods.

Mato snapped out his orders.

"Start scooping up that dirt, you!"

This was directed at the apparently aged, white-whiskered laborer with the pick and shovel. This laborer, Quick Trigger, had not spoken from the time eight blanketed bodies had been removed from the temporary stone vault.

The colored driver of the truck stood mumbling to one side. The eight boxes, he supposed, contained the unidentifiable bodies of inmates killed in the fire two nights before.

"You grab that other shovel and get busy!" the tight-mouthed Mato directed the driver.

"Yassah! Yassah."

The driver picked up a shovel; Mato's eyes were shifting to take in all of their surroundings. A narrow road led through the woods. No person was visible within Mato's range of vision. The colored driver seemed to get some relief from his fear by employing his shovel.

Quick Trigger was working industriously. In the morning light, the ex-deputy's faded eyes appeared very nearsighted. Mato regarded this new laborer, sent to help dig the graves, as a negligible figure. Quick Trigger's eyes were deceptive. They were

now keenly upon those eight plain boxes, the length of which provided for the body of a man.

As Quick Trigger worked the shovel, heaving dirt, his arm touched the outline of one of his old service revolvers strapped under his overalls. He had not betrayed himself when he had made almost sure that one of the supposed corpses was that of The Whisperer, nor when he had learned that others in at least two of the boxes were alive.

Quick Trigger saw the plain lid of one of the boxes begin to lift slowly. He did not vary the motion of his shovel, but one hand shifted to his revolver. The lid of another box was slowly being raised when the mumbling colored driver happened to look that way. The colored driver's shovel flew from his hands.

"Shape o' de debil!" the driver squawked. "Dey's ghostes!"

Mato whirled. A blackjack slid from his sleeve. This "sapper" came down on the hard head of the colored driver and the man pitched into the hole, the grave he had been digging.

The lids of two more boxes were coming open. Four in all were now being thrown off. Quick Trigger dropped his shovel, turning. He had been prepared, but the startled action of the colored man had upset his calculation.

The hard, bearded face of a man looked at him from one of the death boxes. The eyes in that leering face were spaced behind a gun pointed directly at Quick Trigger.

The ex-deputy slammed his body to the ground, even as his own revolver came free. But there would have been no escaping slugs from that gun if the lid of another box had not at that instant snapped all the way off.

The Whisperer heaved himself upward, his right arm dangling, but his left fist swinging with all the furious strength that had given him his fame.

Even as the gun was about to explode in the hand of the mobster aiming at Quick Trigger, knuckles exploded under one of the mobster's ears with the force of a small charge of dynamite.

The Whisperer had been rapidly regaining his lost strength. As his fist swung, his feet heaved the death box from which he had come directly upon another of the Satanic Seven. The second mobster's head was jammed down by the weight of the improvised coffin.

NOW Quick Trigger's big revolver swung around in his hand. Mato, caught by surprise, had made a belated reach for an automatic in his coat.

"Reckon if you don't put up your hands, you won't be able to lift 'em ever!" barked Quick Trigger. "Up with them, alla yuh!"

The Whisperer was on his feet. He had grabbed the pistol of the first man he had hit. A silenced gun let go just back of him on the truck. Slugs furrowed new dirt close to Quick Trigger.

The Whisperer barely turned, striking down and backward with the gun in his hand. The hard metal of its slick barrel rapped across the nose of the gunman. The mobster groaned and subsided into the death box in which he had come to this bogus burial.

The fourth boxed mobster did not attempt to use a weapon. He was to one side of The Whisperer. He was the man known as Toroni, bulky of body and savage of face.

As he growled an oath, he launched his weight upon The Whisperer. The gun flew from The Whisperer's hand and the pair rolled together from the truck.

Mato had lifted his hands slowly, menaced by the revolver of Quick Trigger. Then Mato's narrowed eyes saw Quick Trigger's gaze shift briefly to the battle on the death truck. It was his chance, or so he believed. One of his hands came down.

Quick Trigger's big revolver should have belched fire. The trigger jammed. Mato's hand dipped into one pocket, was coming out with a pistol that gleamed wickedly in the morning sun. With but one useful arm, The Whisperer had rolled under the death truck with the big man, Toroni.

Quick Trigger did not attempt to pull the revolver trigger a second time. He appeared to Mato to be a white-whiskered, doddering old man. But there was nothing feeble about the speed of Quick Trigger's flying right hand.

The heavy service revolver was shot across the space between the ex-deputy and Mato, with something like the speed of one of its own bullets. Its smashing collision with the peaked forehead of Mato made it seem impossible his skull could survive the shock.

The boss of the Satanic Seven threw up his hands and fell across the body of the colored driver. Old Quick Trigger whirled toward the battling Whisperer. Then he halted abruptly.

The Whisperer was stretched inertly on the ground. All the life seemed to have been crushed from his much-battered body. He was limp, eyes apparently closed, arms and legs suddenly robbed of all power.

Toroni's big body bent over him. Toroni had lifted a spare pick that had come with the truck for the digging of the graves. The brutal mobster was making sure—very sure—that when the point of the pick descended it would transfix the head of his apparently unconscious enemy.

Old Quick Trigger groaned in desperation. No movement he could make would be in time to save The Whisperer. The pick started down, swinging in Toroni's powerful, black-haired hands.

An amazing thing happened. The Whisperer's head jerked to one side, barely enough to miss the

descending point. The pick sank into the ground. Toroni cursed, pulled forward, temporarily off balance.

There was nothing ethical about what happened then. One of The Whisperer's feet shot upward. It might have been propelled by the hind leg of a mule.

Toroni's hard jaws crunched together. The Whisperer's heel had hit him squarely under the chin. Toroni's lower jaw, at least, would be useless for chewing purposes for sometime to come.

Quick Trigger leaped to the side of The Whisperer. He caught up the mobster's gun that had been dropped. Its round hole swung upon the dazed three members of the Satanic Seven still among the death boxes.

"I reckon," drawled Quick Trigger, "you can have your choice: You can climb back into those coffins as you are, or you'll be put there permanently."

The Whisperer was getting to his feet. He leaned weakly against the side of the truck.

"Great work, Quick Trigger," he praised. "But now we've got to move fast. Mato's plan was to get his four nice boys out of here and join them for another unexpected raid in the city. Well, Mato's going on that raid, but he's going in one of his boxes."

The scared colored driver was coming to his senses. His eyes rolled at what he saw, but The Whisperer's husky voice seemed to hold him in a sort of trance.

Baylor, Toroni, Janna and Levizo were back in the death boxes. Under the threat of Quick Trigger's steady pistol, they were disarmed. The colored driver employed the long screws ready for fastening the death boxes permanently.

AS Quick Trigger lifted Mato's limp body into the death box from which he himself had come, The Whisperer made a hasty search. Under Mato's shirt, next to his body, was a gruesome object. This was the tattooed skin taken from the breast of Godfrey Yodens.

The Whisperer replaced the skin, made sure that Mato was still breathing, then had the box lid screwed down.

Within ten minutes from the time it had arrived at the burial ground, the rattling death truck was chugging into the side road leading out through the woods. Five long, plain boxes were in the truck. Each contained a living man—Mato and the others of the Satanic Seven. The three other boxes had been left at the scene of the burial.

It was expedient to take the colored driver along. The Whisperer remained out of sight in the back of the truck. Quick Trigger rode with the driver.

The truck avoided the main highway, taking to the side roads. It might be several hours before the strange absence of the truck was noted, as the burial itself would have taken half a day.

The truck was deep in a wooded side road when The Whisperer had it stopped. Only a few minutes later, the body of Godfrey Yodens had been removed from its shallow grave. The dead convict was wrapped in canvas and placed among the boxes.

Again the truck started along back roads toward the city. The Whisperer kept himself from view. Those who passed saw only a plain, unlettered truck containing some boxes over which canvas had been drawn.

The Whisperer was close to Quick Trigger and talked to him in his low, husky voice.

"Judge Patrick Kyley will have some unexpected witnesses," said The Whisperer. "By this time, possibly I am no longer commissioner of police. We will drive directly to a parking place near the court, then I'll have this arm patched up."

Quick Trigger said, "Harrison Weymouth probably will be the only witness against Yuli to show up."

The truck rattled over the stones of a city back street. A newsboy was shouting.

"Read all about it! Second Weymouth brother killed!"

The white-whiskered Quick Trigger purchased a newspaper.

The policeman on guard had discovered the body of Harrison Weymouth. Hoker and Campbell had left the city.

CHAPTER XIV
ANOTHER WHISPERER

"THERE you have it, Quick Trigger," said The Whisperer. "At this moment, Judge Kyley is frothing at the mouth. He will have to bring Yuli, Smiles Orson and the others up for a hearing, and there will be no witness to identify Yuli. Detective Corcoran failed to see Yuli himself. The fingerprints of Mato mean nothing."

There was a ghostly chuckle. Quick Trigger grinned faintly behind his white whiskers.

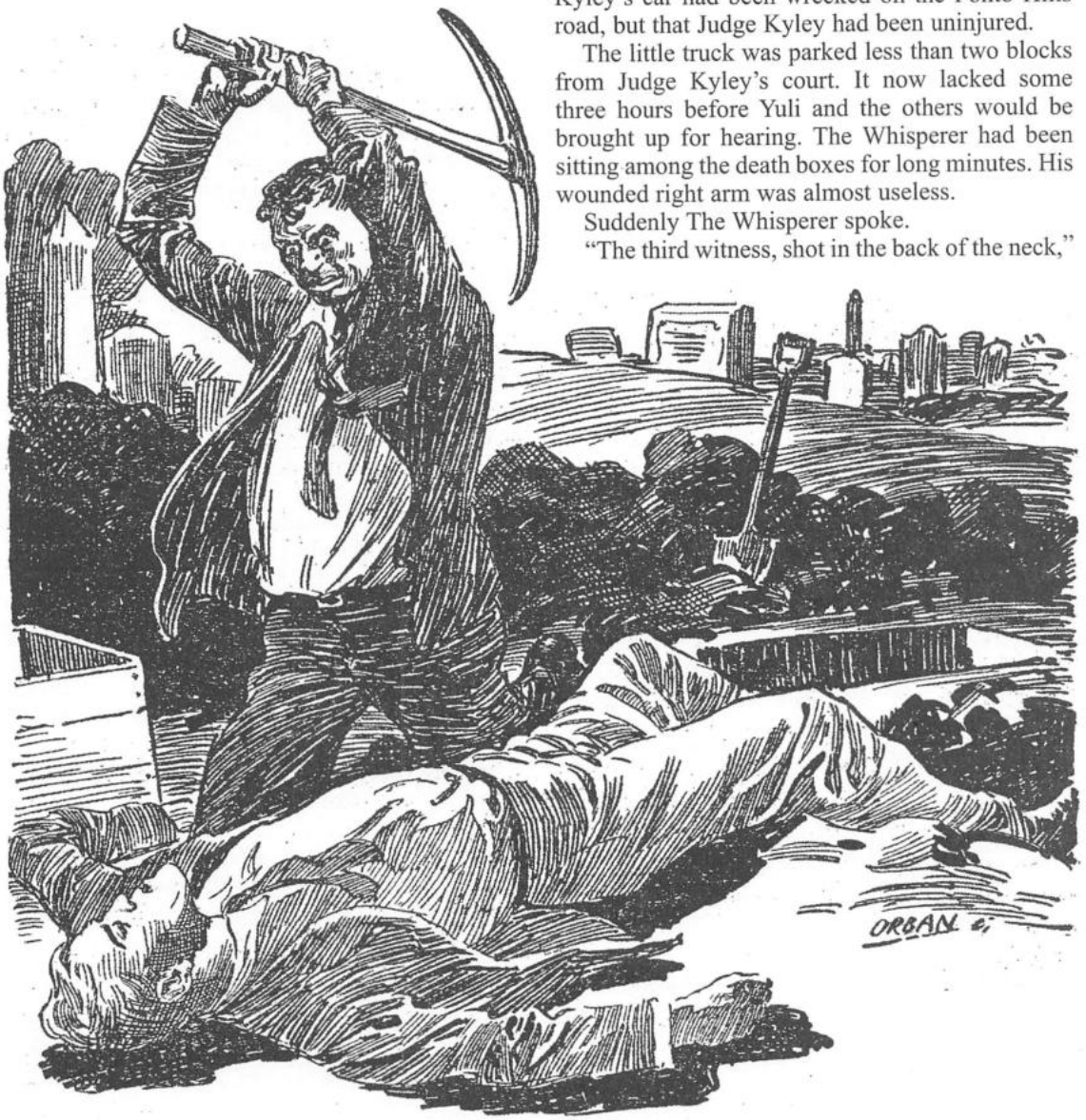
"So they got Harrison Weymouth," said The Whisperer. "And the story says the records of the

dead Nell Arthurs were on the floor. It may be that the outside killers got something else. In the meantime, Quick Trigger, the killer in this instance will feel himself safe enough. He is not one of the Satanic Seven."

"Hellamighty!" exploded Quick Trigger. "Ninety-nine chances to one the killer himself will be at the Yuli hearing!"

"That's it," said The Whisperer. "And that same killer, or killers, will be waiting for Mato and the

The Whisperer was stretched inertly on the ground. All the life seemed to have been crushed from his body.



others this morning. Somehow, they expected to make another attempt to get at Godfrey Yodens' hidden million."

The Whisperer was looking at the newspaper story. The story told how Harrison Weymouth had been shot in the back of the neck. Another story stated that action was being taken by Mayor Van Royston to temporarily replace Wildcat Gordon as police commissioner, the commissioner having been absent since the previous night.

No word appeared about the abduction of Judge Kyley. The Whisperer grinned a little at that. Patrick Kyley was a smart as well as a proud man. It was unlikely he would give out a story to the papers that he had been kidnapped.

But there was a brief item to the effect that Judge Kyley's car had been wrecked on the Ponto Hills road, but that Judge Kyley had been uninjured.

The little truck was parked less than two blocks from Judge Kyley's court. It now lacked some three hours before Yuli and the others would be brought up for hearing. The Whisperer had been sitting among the death boxes for long minutes. His wounded right arm was almost useless.

Suddenly The Whisperer spoke.

"The third witness, shot in the back of the neck," he said. "The offices of Weymouth & Weymouth are guarded. Quick Trigger, I have a favor to ask of you. For a short time, you shall become The Whisperer."

The Whisperer's cold eyes were fixed upon the death boxes. In those five boxes were five of the most ruthless murderers the city ever had known. They had been responsible for death of wholesale order, of cruel, inhuman torturing.

Quick Trigger heard the weird, chilling whisper come from the enclosed back of the truck.

"An eye for an eye," were the icy words.

WITHIN the hour, four detectives were guarding

the stairs and the elevators leading to the sixteenth floor offices of Weymouth & Weymouth. The body of the murdered Harrison Weymouth had been removed.

A squad working under Deputy Henry Bolton had uncovered nothing in the way of clues. There was only the bullet buried at the base of Harrison Weymouth's brain, which might sometime later be checked with a gun, if by a freakish chance such a gun ever came into the hands of the police.

In other words, Deputy Bolton, egged on by Mayor Van Royston, was working a dead-end murder case. Judge Kyley had conferred with Mayor Van Royston, had sought Wildcat Gordon. But Wildcat Gordon could not be found, and neither could Quick Trigger, with whom he resided.

Judge Kyley was keeping his mouth tightly closed concerning his own abduction. He was hoping the time would come when he could make his own settlement with the notorious Whisperer. Perhaps the astute judge had been making some deductions of his own. Wildcat Gordon had called him the previous night. Then the judge had been abducted, and Wildcat had disappeared.

Judge Kyley was a firm friend of Wildcat's. Possibly, he was fearing The Whisperer had been responsible for Wildcat's absence.

Anyway, now that it was too late, the offices of Weymouth & Weymouth were closely guarded. Those few persons who called on business were turned back at the elevators by the four detectives.

Judge Kyley had suggested that it might become necessary to make an examination of all deposit boxes in the establishment, in the hope of unearthing some evidence against Yuli.

The job of guarding the offices was a dull one for the detectives. Even the sight of an old, white-bearded garbage man who came up the backstairs was a relief.

The bearded garbage man carried a huge canvas bag. He started along the row of offices, emptying wastebaskets into the larger receptacle.

When he had the canvas bag full, he clattered back down the stairs. In a little while, he returned. By this time, the detectives had lost all interest in the routine janitor's work. They did not notice that the bearded garbage man was carrying his huge canvas bag with somewhat of an effort. It was slung across one shoulder.

The garbage man went in through the reception room, back into the main offices of Weymouth & Weymouth. None of the detectives saw him when he set the large bag on the floor near where Harrison Weymouth had died.

Back in the outer offices, the garbage man appeared in haste to be through with his morning's work. He mumbled or half whispered to himself.

Apparently, he had not liked entering the murder room. He made a quick cleanup, emptying the remaining wastebaskets. Then he went down the stairs for the final time.

THE detectives yawned. The vast area of the sixteenth floor was quiet. This quiet was abruptly terminated. A man in greasy overalls came charging up the backstairs. He was a huge fellow. There was a discoloration under his right eye.

"You seen him?" he shouted. "My keys, they are gone! He hits me, then I go to sleep! You seen him, yes, an old man—"

"Great guns!" snapped one of the detectives. "Knocked you out, huh? Come on, boys!"

The four coppers pushed through the door into the inner office where Harrison Weymouth had been found murdered. They saw a man sitting in the chair where the corpse had been. His hands trailed limply to the floor. His head was down on the desktop.

"Look! The same spot! Like they found those others!"

One detective pointed a shaking hand at the dead man. A bullet had drilled neatly into the back of his neck. There had been little blood. The detective pulled the head to one side.

"Toroni!" he gasped. "One of the Satanic Seven! Hell, boys, he was in that canvas bag! And the old fellow was whispering to himself! Fellows, we've rubbed sleeves with The Whisperer, and he walked out on us!"

Another detective was touching a white paper pinned to the coat of the dead Toroni.

"An eye for an eye."

Toroni, the one of the Satanic Seven who had tried to drive a pick through The Whisperer's skull. Now, he was just another corpse substituting for a murdered witness.

The latest report burst like a bombshell in the office of Wildcat Gordon. Deputy Bolton took the report. The detective said it was The Whisperer himself. They had seen him close up. He was an old, bearded man, but he had tremendous strength.

ABOUT this time, the attendant of a big parking lot watched a small, partly covered truck pull into the street. The attendant walked along the rows of parked cars. Suddenly, his lower jaw dropped and he halted.

"Geeminy!" he gulped out. "Why, that—that looks like a coffin!"

The little truck had disappeared before the scared attendant had summoned others. A plain, rough box was setting on the ground. It was remarkably like a crude coffin. The side and bottom were stained where blood had run down.

A few minutes later the word of this box was adding to the troubles of the harassed Deputy Henry Bolton.

Deputy Bolton had a general alarm out to pick up an old, bearded man with stooped shoulders. An old man wearing blue overalls.

Mayor Van Royston was talking in a squeaky tone of excitement to five grave-faced citizens. They were members of the Reform Party committee.

"I wouldn't accuse Commissioner Gordon of deliberately dodging this terrible issue," said the mayor. "But where is he? Deputy Bolton will bear me out in the statement that Gordon personally and strongly approves of some of these murders. Why, he said to me that he would like to shake The Whisperer by the hand."

One of the four committee men, redhaired and portly, nodded.

"Damn it, mayor!" he exploded. "I don't know but I'd like to pat The Whisperer's back myself in this 'eye-for-an-eye' business!"

The other four members of the committee looked a bit shocked at that. Plainly they were inclined to agree with Mayor Van Royston that Wildcat Gordon was, at least, neglecting his duty.

Judge Kyley called from his court. Was there any word of Wildcat Gordon? Had either of the witnesses, Hoker or Campbell, been found?

Mayor Van Royston was forced to reply, "No. No word. No witnesses."

Judge Kyley said wearily, "Then we have no case."

CHAPTER XV
THE TRANSPARENT PAGE

DEPUTY HENRY BOLTON said to Detective Sergeant Thorsen, "Your presence won't be required at court. You can stick around and look after things. If anyone answering the description of The Whisperer is brought in, I want to see him."

"Yes, sir," replied the wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen. "I supposed as investigating officer in the Weymouth holdup, I would be required to give testimony."

"What little you know won't help anybody!" snapped Deputy Bolton.

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Thorsen, without batting an eye.

The sergeant was getting the usual rotten break he could expect from Deputy Bolton. Still, he was Army trained. He could take it. And on this particular occasion, it was one of the luckiest breaks Wildcat Gordon had ever been given.

About the time Deputy Bolton gave that order, and was himself, with Mayor Van Royston and the others, preparing to go to the hearing in Judge Kyley's court, an old, bearded man who fully answered the description of the garbage man in the Weymouth offices, stepped suddenly aside from the crowded street into a cigar store.

He had been given no time to alter his appearance. As he was, he was on his way to rejoin The Whisperer on the death truck. He was old Quick Trigger.

The retired ex-deputy had extraordinary keen senses. Years in the police business had taught him to observe all persons close to him in a crowd. Since leaving the Barkley Block a few minutes before, Quick Trigger had become aware of two neatly dressed, slick-looking young men staying close to him in the sidewalk crowd.

As he stepped into the cigar store, he stood at the counter and bought some pipe tobacco. His near-sighted eyes did not appear able to see through the windows of the store, but he saw one of the slick-looking youths halted in a doorway across the street. Almost at once, the other youth strolled by the cigar store looking in.

Quick Trigger shuffled hastily to the sidewalk. He reversed the direction he had been going and cut into a narrow side street, where few persons were to be seen. He did not appear to glance over one shoulder, but he knew when the two young fellows came into the narrow street and hurried to overtake him.

Quick Trigger continued his shuffling, as if he did not hear the hurried pounding of feet. If he had known his shadowers were the murderers of Harrison Weymouth, he might have acted more discreetly. Perhaps he would have done as he did, for Quick Trigger at times yielded to flaming rage.

THE two youths had been considerably puzzled. According to a schedule laid down by Mato, boss of the Satanic Seven, he should have appeared near the Barkley Block with the other four of the mob sometime before. The youths had seen old Quick Trigger's suspicious actions near the Weymouth offices.

The two were determined to find out what—if any—connection the queerly dressed, stoop-shouldered old man might have with the possible delay of Mato and his men.

Coming up behind Quick Trigger, the pair divided. One jammed a pointed object from one coat pocket into Quick Trigger's side.

It was an automatic and it might have chilled the spines of most persons. Old Quick Trigger's reaction was as fast as that of Wildcat Gordon might have been. The youth snarled, "Just a minute, grandpa! We want to—"

What the young gunman got was not what he wanted. Quick Trigger twisted away from the gun, spun and struck with gnarled fists too fast for the first man to dodge. At the same instant, he delivered a smashing kick into the closest shin of the other man.

Both of the nice, young men had guns. Perhaps neither cared to employ these in the open. That was

not their type. But they were young and strong, and should have quickly subdued this old, stoop-shouldered man in the overalls.

Their attempt was much like trying to halt a flying buzz saw. One man hit the bricks on his back, and the other followed. The first one down then lost his head. He jerked out his gun. Quick Trigger's kicking, square-toed shoe sent it flying against a wall.

What might have happened then was abruptly terminated by the arrival of two detectives opposite the mouth of the street. In less than ten seconds, they were jerking the two youthful thugs to their feet.

Old Quick Trigger, disguised as he was, started to shuffle away.

"Just a minute, old-timer!" said one of the dicks. "Maybe we could use a witness! Well, by—"

The other detective saw it, too. Here was the old man for whom the latest description had been sent out as the notorious Whisperer. In five minutes the two youthful gunmen, handcuffed together, and Quick Trigger, shackled to one of the dicks, were on their way to headquarters.

The two detectives were among Sergeant Thorsen's picked men. And Sergeant Thorsen was in, was held in the office by the order of Deputy Bolton. Neither of the detectives had recognized Quick Trigger, being new men and his disguise being fair. Not so with Sergeant Thorsen.

He identified Quick Trigger instantly, but his wooden face showed no evidence of it.

"Keep this pinch quiet, boys," he instructed. "I'll wait until the court stuff is cleaned up. Lock up those two mugs separately and give them the once-over."

The glowering young gunmen were led out. Sergeant Thorsen then said, "Out with it, Quick Trigger. Where's Wildcat? What's the game? We are all washed up in that Yuli case, and this may put you in a mighty tough spot."

Old Quick Trigger grinned slightly.

"Wildcat's all O.K., sergeant. He was going to contact you in a few minutes. In the meantime, you're going to be near Judge Kyley's court."

The two detectives returned.

"Those two are new eggs," reported one. "Couple of guns that will hold them, and that's about all. Oh, except this."

The detective extended a transparent page covered with varicolored drawings. It looked like a weird, incomplete symbol. Old Quick Trigger grunted an oath. He gave Sergeant Thorsen a quick signal.

Sergeant Thorsen said to the detectives, "Good work, boys. That will be all."

As soon as they were alone, Quick Trigger said, "There's no time to lose. All right then, I'm suspected of being The Whisperer. But I've got to change my disguise, get out of here and go drive a truck."

Three minutes later, a stoutish man with a new kind of beard left headquarters. A minute later, Detective Sergeant Thorsen had disobeyed the order of a superior officer. He was in a squad car that cut across town in the direction of Judge Kyley's court.

Behind Sergeant Thorsen's car another one moved more slowly. In it were three detectives and two tightly shackled young gunmen.

Old Quick Trigger had disappeared. Sergeant Thorsen permitted himself one of his rare exclamations.

"The old son of a gun!" he said, to no one in particular.

PERHAPS none had ever seen Judge Patrick Kyley more downcast. The pudgy jurist sat wearily in his great chair looking down at the crowded courtroom. Immediately in front of him were six legal gentlemen whose presence at any other time would have caused the fiery judge Kyley to bristle for battle. Led by a man named Shrumm, they were the cream of the underworld shysters.

It was seldom that such a battery of the lower type of criminal lawyers ever was wasted on Judge Kyley's court. But it seemed the word must have gone out that Yuli, Smiles Orson and the four other alibi witnesses had the game all in their own hands. While they had been cooling off in jail, the most dangerous witnesses had been removed.

There was not a single witness who could identify Yuli as having been connected with the Weymouth murders, or definitely dispute the perjury of Smiles Orson. True, three witnesses had died, and two others had hurriedly left town. But Attorney Shrumm and his battery of legal talent accepted this as all in the day's work.

This would be an opportunity seldom offered to gloat over the most dangerous judicial enemy of the underworld.

Judge Kyley's shoulders sagged. He glanced up with apparent slight interest when Mayor Van Royston and five Reform Party committeemen came in and took seats. Judge Kyley's lips moved without sound.

He was saying, "If I only knew more about that abduction business last night and what became of Wildcat Gordon? Without witnesses, I can't even detain Yuli or Smiles Orson."

The prisoners were being brought in. Deputy Henry Bolton and several other coppers maintained a guard at the rear of the courtroom. Deputy Bolton was feeling his importance. A dozen newspapermen were crowding the press table.

The Yuli case in itself was not so much, but it was big stuff as a part of the sequential murders of the past forty-eight hours. The absence of Wildcat Gordon was regarded as significant.

As soon as the smirking Yuli, Smiles Orson and the others were seated, Attorney Shrumm arose with an immediate motion.

"Your honor, in the absence of any direct witnesses against the defendant, Yuli, Smiles Orson and their companions, I would move an immediate dismissal of the charges on which they have been unjustly held."

ORDINARILY, that would have brought a roar from Judge Kyley. Now he merely nodded slightly and said, "Deputy Bolton, might I ask if you have had any word of the only witnesses in this case who have not been foully murdered?"

"We have no word," said Deputy Bolton, and added with venomous emphasis: "And Commissioner Gordon left the case in somewhat of a tangle when he disappeared, your honor."

"I did not ask your opinion, Deputy Bolton!" snapped Judge Kyley, showing a little life for the first time.

He added: "If I were to follow my moral convictions, I would remand Yuli, Smiles Orson and these other four to prison without bail. They have at least been the indirect cause of three dastardly murders, though I must admit they cannot be held for crimes which it has been impossible for them to commit."

"I object!" shouted Attorney Shrumm, jumping to his feet. "There is no evidence or justification in—"

"Sit down!" thundered Judge Kyley. "If I am forced to dismiss this criminal scum you happen to take pride in representing, that is no reason why I have to listen to any of your windy blasts!"

"But," said Attorney Shrumm, sarcastically, "might I suggest you have no alternative—"

Judge Kyley rapped his gavel. He made one more appeal.

"You made sure, Deputy Bolton, that Officer Corcoran did not see this particular defendant, Yuli?"

"We regret he did not," stated Deputy Bolton. "Only Commissioner Gordon—"

"You've answered the question!" rapped out Judge Kyley. "I am about to perform what I consider the crowning disgrace of all of my years on the bench. A police commissioner, through no fault of his own, I am sure, has been unable to complete a case against Yuli, Smiles Orson and these other defendants. Have you anymore serious charges than suspicion of conspiracy to rob and murder against Yuli, Deputy Bolton?"

"How could I have with Commissioner Gordon running out—"

"That will be all, Deputy Bolton!" snapped Judge Kyley. "You have a mean habit of talking too much! These cases are dismissed!"

IN one of the seats near the rear of the courtroom, Mayor Van Royston bobbed his slickly combed head and pushed out his retreating chin.

"You see, gentlemen," he said to the Reform Party committeemen. "The choice is forced upon me. You have had great faith in Commissioner Gordon. He has been a stubborn, intractable man. It is purely his neglect of duty that is permitting these prisoners to walk out."

The party committeemen nodded doubtfully. Yuli, with his flat nose and dark skin, had swaggered to his feet. Smiles Orson, with his face bruised by Judge Kyley's fists, grinned cheerfully.

"See you again in the funnies, judge!" he exclaimed. "And this mistake will cost you plenty!"

Led by Attorney Shrumm, the battery of shyster lawyers played maddening smiles upon the judge they most fervently hated.

There was a commotion near the door at that moment. Deputy Henry Bolton led half a dozen of his officers in that direction.

"Hey, there!" bawled Deputy Bolton. "What do you think this is, a warehouse or maybe the morgue? Now you fellows get them boxes back out of here! Make it snappy!"

An old, battered truck with a mumbling colored driver stood in front of the court building. Men were carrying long, coffinlike boxes toward the door of Judge Kyley's courtroom.

CHAPTER XVI
OUT OF DEATH BOXES

A BULKY, bearded man was directing the transfer of four long, plain boxes from the truck toward the sacred precincts of the courtroom. The little truck had just arrived at the curb. The bulky man had picked out a dozen or more loafers from the sidewalk, giving them a dollar apiece to lift the boxes from the truck.

"But we'll get ourselves in a jam, packin' them things into the court, boss," protested one of the dollar workers. "You don't mean right into Judge Kyley's court? He's tough on any jokers."

"I'll stand for all of the jam, and this isn't any joke!" snapped the bulky, bearded man. "Right on in, and up in front of the judge's bench with the boxes!"

Deputy Bolton reached the bulky man with a long stride. He was backed up by several of his coppers. Mayor Van Royston and the party committeemen were climbing on benches with others of the crowd to see what might be happening.

"Blazes!" ejaculated the mayor. "Looks like the rough boxes they use to put coffins in!"

The smirking Yuli and the grinning Smiles Orson were heading the defendants on their way out of the courtroom. Attorney Shrumm and the battery of underworld shysters were also getting on benches to see over the heads of the milling audience.

Judge Patrick Kyley could see the strange jam in the courtroom door. He heard the bulky, bearded man shout suddenly.

"Hold everything, Judge Kyley! We have new evidence!"

"What's all this rot, Judge Kyley?" yelled Attorney Shrumm to make himself heard. "You needn't think you can get away with another one of your smart tricks on my clients! This court is the laughingstock—"

Frustrated rage, disappointment, fear for the safety of Wildcat Gordon had been slowly boiling inside the fighting jurist. All of his anger and helplessness had become a powerful ferment. It required only Attorney Shrumm's insulting, sneering exclamation to touch off the explosion.

Even in this critical moment, Judge Kyley was sticking to the legal letter of the law.

"This court is hereby adjourned!" he shouted, but the words were scattered as the pudgy, red-faced jurist bounded from his chair. His feet struck the top of the bar and then all of his weight hit the scornful Attorney Shrumm.

The shyster lawyer went off the bench on which he was standing, and a sideswiping blow from Judge Kyley's fist sent another of the underworld legal battery with him.

THIS commotion went almost unnoticed, for at this instant in the rear of the court, at the entrance, Deputy Bolton had reached the bulky, bearded man. He reached out with one long arm, setting his fingers on the bulky man's collar.

"You're under arrest!" rapped out Deputy Bolton. "The rest of you boys clear these hoodlums out of here!"

An astonishing thing happened. The bulky man's coat slipped from his shoulders. With it came cloth padding that had made him seem hefty. At the same time, his heavy beard slipped from place.

Old Quick Trigger's set face confronted Deputy Henry Bolton. Then the hardness of the ex-deputy's countenance faded swiftly.

Deputy Bolton shouted, "It's Quick Trigger!" He struck the older man's face with the flat of his hand.

Quick Trigger now wore a flashing grin of the greatest delight.

"I've waited a long time for this chance, Henry!" he yelled. "Now take it, you long-nosed meddler!"

Quick Trigger's fists smashed one-two, one-two, and they seemed definitely aimed at the long beak of Deputy Bolton. Not a single blow missed its mark. Deputy Bolton was knocked back into the arms of his own coppers.

The deputy bounded up, blood streaming over his mouth.

"Arrest him!" he directed harshly. "Grab those fellows carrying boxes!"

The four men carrying the first box that looked like a coffin were not of the type to desire any run-in with the police. They suddenly let go of their burden and the long wooden container smashed to the floor.

"Great gosh!" exploded Mayor Van Royston. "Look! It's a man in that box! A dead one—no, he's alive!"

The side of the dropped box had broken. A man's hand and arm stuck out. The hand made sudden, frantic effort to tear away more of the broken side of the box.

"Get those fellows, all of them!" bellowed Deputy Bolton. "Have the damn boxes put back on the truck!"

Bolton's coppers started to carry out the command. The men carrying the remaining three boxes attempted to drop their loads and escape. They were suddenly confronted by the unemotional wooden face of Detective Sergeant Thorsen. The big sergeant was standing in the courtroom doorway.

"Let those boxes be taken before Judge Kyley!" snapped Sergeant Thorsen. "Release Quick Trigger!"

"You?" squawked Deputy Bolton. "Who are you to be giving orders? I assigned you to headquarters duty! Get out of the—"

A new commotion broke loose. Yuli had lost the smirking confidence on his face. Smiles Orson no longer was smiling. Yuli sidled swiftly into the crowd, followed by Smiles Orson and the other four alibi witnesses. Yuli had glimpsed the face of the one man attempting to escape from the broken box.

It was the evil, tight-mouthed face of Mato, the man known at the Rayburn Asylum as Charles Raymond, supervisor. Yuli must have decided this second dismissal of charges would be about all he could expect. The flat-nosed member of the Satanic Seven had almost reached the side exit. Some of the audience shouted in alarm.

A woman who had been sitting quietly, heavily veiled, arose suddenly in front of the escaping defendants. Her slender, gloved hands caught at Yuli's heavy shoulders.

"No! No!" she cried out. "They must not get away! They had my husband murdered!"

The woman's veil fell off, revealing the beautiful features of Mrs. James Weymouth. The widow of the first murdered witness had come to the court to hear what fate would be meted out to the men she knew to be the cause of her husband's brutal death.

The flat-nosed Yuli cursed vilely. His fist smashed into the woman's face, knocking her from his pathway. He sprang over a bench, as the woman screamed and fell. The open door was before him, unguarded.

YULI was in that doorway when a single revolver shot cracked from the courtroom entrance. One bullet passed over the heads of the milling audience. Yuli's heavy body spun around, as if he had been struck by

a club. One hand clutched at a smashed shoulder and he tried to go on, but he fell to his knees.

Detective Sergeant Thorsen had not moved from the entrance door. His service revolver smoked in his hand. There was a sudden, breathless hush. Into this came Sergeant Thorsen's calm, carrying voice.

"Stay on the floor, Yuli, or the next one splits your spine! You, Smiles Orson, and your other rats, lie down where you are!"

Yuli groaned, but he did not move. Smiles Orson and his cringing alibi witnesses dropped to the floor.

At this moment, Judge Patrick Kyley's bloody, but joyous, red face popped up. His knuckles were torn, but the battery of shyster lawyers had ceased to be a battery.

"This is terrible—terrible," said Mayor Van Royston. "I have no doubt but Wildcat Gordon's hand is in it. Gentlemen, the disgrace of this riot will destroy the effectiveness of our police."

Mayor Van Royston's squeaky voice then reached Deputy Bolton.

"Deputy Bolton!" he commanded. "You will arrest Sergeant Thorsen! Have this Quick Trigger and the hoodlums with those boxes put under guard!"

Deputy Bolton had gotten clear of Quick Trigger. He repeated the order of the mayor.

He added: "Sergeant Thorsen, hand over your gun and badge! I am in command of this department now! Men, get those boxes out of here!"

A crisp, cold voice cracked like a whip over the courtroom crowd.

"Your error, Henry! I still command this police department!"

With a new Army hat cocked over one eye, his red necktie flaunting above a carnation in the lapel of new attire, Wildcat Gordon stepped beside Sergeant Thorsen.

"Sit down, everyone in this room!" rapped Wildcat, with that snap of command that was seldom disobeyed. "Sergeant Thorsen, you will have the other prisoners brought in! Quick Trigger, direct your hired men to place those boxes before Judge Kyley's bench! You other boys, get over there and put the bracelets on Yuli, Smiles Orson and those other nice fellows!"

It was remarkable what instant effect the presence of the police commissioner had on the crowd and the coppers. Judge Patrick Kyley blinked blood from his eyes, one of which was puffed and discolored. He looked over the heads of the crowd at the gaudy figure of Wildcat Gordon. None noticed that Wildcat's right arm was carefully held motionless.

"You have new evidence, Commissioner Gordon?" the judge called.

"What's left of it alive, and if there should happen to be a dead man or two, so much the better," stated Wildcat.

CHAPTER XVII
THE TATTOOED SYMBOL

FOUR long, plain boxes reposed before Judge Patrick Kyley. Another body, wrapped in canvas, lay beside them. Quick Trigger and others were unscrewing the lids of the boxes.

Four men were inside, much battered and much alive, but with ferocious, murderous-looking eyes for the coppers who pulled their hands behind them and snapped on handcuffs. Yuli's shattered shoulder made the bracelets for him unnecessary.

The living men from the boxes were seated beside the flat-nosed Yuli as Judge Kyley said, "Commissioner Gordon, this is your evidence? If so, would you mind informing the court of its character, the identity of these men, not to mention the unusual manner of bringing them into court?"

Wildcat's hard left hand spun one man around.

"Name's Baylor!" he snapped. Wildcat twisted another head.

"This one's Levizo!"

Wildcat pushed the third man roughly.

"Janna!" he gritted. "With two men called Toroni and Danvers, they were the insiders who caused the Graywall Prison break and the deaths of many men, all of which was engineered by this"—Wildcat caught the fourth man and jammed him into a chair—"slick killer and racketeer, known on the records as Mato, leader of the Satanic Seven!"

Two glowering youthful men were ranged alongside the prisoners.

"These two give the names of Stevens and Young, probably phonies," Wildcat said harshly. "They are the murderers of Harrison Weymouth, who was killed this morning, possibly of his brother, James! They are two out-of-town gunmen hired by the Satanic Seven!"

Attorney Shrumm swayed to his feet.

"I object, your honor!" he shouted. "These are mere statements of a lawless police commissioner drunk with his own power! None of this is evidence! Where are the witnesses for all—"

"Sit down!" thundered Judge Kyley. "Commissioner Gordon, you are smiling! What more have you?"

WILDCAT'S Texas eyes surveyed Attorney Shrumm in a manner that promised the underworld shyster a most unpleasant future. Wildcat pulled back the canvas from the body lying on the floor. He permitted Judge Kyley to view the torn breast of Godfrey Yodens. Then he replaced the canvas.

Wildcat swung on the rodent-faced Mato.

"I'll have that piece of tattooed skin, Mato!"

The gruesome piece of evidence with its colored design was laid on the table. Wildcat snapped an order to Sergeant Thorsen. Thorsen produced a transparent sheet of paper.

"I took this from one of the two younger prisoners this morning, your honor," stated Thorsen. "They had assaulted an old man, and they had come from the offices of Weymouth & Weymouth."

"It's like this, Judge Kyley," said Wildcat, placing an inked, transparent page over the patch of skin torn from Godfrey Yodens' breast. "The tattooed skin alone means nothing. Neither does this inked page taken from the book kept by Nell Arthurs, who happened to have been the daughter of Yodens. But if we put them together like this—"

The transparent page was fitted over the tattooed skin. It could be seen instantly that the inked symbol matched up with the tattooed design. Together they formed a large, colorful number and letter:

168—V

"My men have investigated," stated Wildcat. "The Weymouth deposit box of that number has been found to contain more than a million in cash and securities, proceeds of a bank robbery of a year ago. Godfrey Yodens, Mato, Yuli and possibly these others were in on that robbery. Yodens was smart and he hid the loot in the last possible place his partners would have looked for it.

"It seems that Mato double-crossed Godfrey Yodens and was letting him take the rap for the bank robbery. Then five of the Satanic Seven were imprisoned for other rackets. The rest of it is public knowledge. These prisoners and the evidence are ready for the district attorney, Judge Kyley."

JUDGE PATRICK KYLEY sat with one eye almost closed. Perhaps he was reconstructing the events of the previous night, his kidnapping, the substitution of real killers in each case where there had been murdered witnesses.

The Weymouth robbery and murders, the Graywall Prison break, the asylum fire, the later killing of witnesses against Yuli were solved. The evidence was simple enough, but there was a great deal, a very great deal lacking.

"Commissioner Gordon," said Judge Kyley, "much has been reported about The Whisperer in connection with this case. It would appear that he must be an avenging enemy of these men you call the Satanic Seven. Have you any report of him?"

Wildcat Gordon flicked a petal from his glowing carnation.

"None of any consequence," he stated calmly. "I may say the department seems indebted to The Whisperer for the strange delivery of this asylum truck this morning."

Wildcat permitted his cold eyes to stray to Detective Sergeant Thorsen.

"Some of my men describe The Whisperer as an old man with a gray beard, but having remarkable strength," said Wildcat. "Unfortunately, we have been unable to round up this old man. The death truck was left in a parking lot, and I was reached by a telephone call. The Whisperer, as we have noted in the past, has some quaint ideas of enjoying himself."

Mayor Van Royston was whispering to the Reform Party committeemen. Wildcat slanted his eyes in that direction.

"I only regret we have been unable to catch The Whisperer," said Wildcat calmly. "I have my own ideas of what form of prosecution he would be called upon to face. I might even think of making him a deputy commissioner."

The party committeemen were smiling. Deputy Henry Bolton rubbed his bruised nose and muttered.

Judge Kyley had made no mention of his abduction. He did not refer to it now.

Judge Patrick Kyley stated, "These defendants are remanded to jail without bail." Then he added: "If you do have the luck to find The Whisperer, Commissioner Gordon, I would ask as a special favor that he be brought before me."

Judge Kyley rubbed his bruised knuckles reflectively.

"Remove the prisoners!" he rapped out. "This court stands adjourned!"

Wildcat Gordon stood before Mayor Van Royston, the party committee and Deputy Henry Bolton.

"Henry," he said quietly, "you will see to it that every effort is made to apprehend The Whisperer. If he should be arrested, you have my standing order to bring him before Judge Patrick Kyley."

THE END

INTERLUDE by Will Murray

The dreaded Whisperer returns for two more hard-hitting cases penned by Laurence Donovan, writing as "Clifford Goodrich."

First up, *The Satanic Seven.* Here, a state prison is the setting for the preliminary action as Wildcat Gordon, in his underworld cover identity as D. Smith, infiltrates its grim gray confines in order to wreck a criminal conspiracy. Side action takes place at the Rayburn Asylum, which is located near Graywall Prison. It's a hard-boiled story, and one of the best the short-lived series had to offer.

Between May and October, 1936, the month he submitted *The Satanic Seven*, Laurence Donovan had produced eight consecutive Whisperer novels. Previously, he had turned out six entries in the Skipper series. With both new Street & Smith titles

breaking on newsstands across America, Donovan, tasked to turning out both series in tandem, began writing them in alternation.

Cover artist John Newton Howitt departed from his signature cover style of placing his scene before an intensely black background for this striking cover. Even the Whisperer is depicted in a different way.

This story, as well as its companion tale, spotlight Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon's unswerving ally in combating crime, Judge Patrick Kiley, who was first introduced in the fifth Whisperer tale, *Mansion of the Missing*.

The Lost Face Murders was submitted as "Murders of the Lost Face" in July, 1937 and published in the December issue, which was the final one. The story revolves around the weird doings at the Hillside Sanitarium, a place where Hollywood celebrities, among others, go to get career-saving plastic surgery.

This fact supports the belief that the unnamed city Wildcat Gordon presides over as police commissioner was a West Coast municipality, such as Los Angeles or San Francisco. But Donovan never stated this explicitly. A De Soto Street locale in *The Satanic Seven* points to San Francisco, a city which does have such a street. Mentions of the Ponto Hills in *The Satanic Seven* and a West River and a North Shore Club in *The Lost Face Murders* do not help with the identification, but only serve to confuse it. This may have been Donovan's intent all along—to obscure its true locale.

Why? Like publishers today, Street & Smith was leery of lawsuits. They fended off enough of them over the years. Rumor has it that when they released the first issue of *Doc Savage Magazine* in 1933, complaining letters from a real doctor named Clark Savage and from writer Kenneth Roberts were received. With the second issue, the house byline was hastily changed to "Kenneth Robeson."

Inasmuch as the Whisperer was in reality a police commissioner named James Gordon, who knew that there wasn't such a similarly named official holding forth in some distant U.S. city? Omitting the city locality may have been defensive.

New York had several police commissioners who might have served as models for Commissioner Gordon, ranging from Rhinelander Waldo to reformist Theodore Roosevelt, who went on to become President of the United States a generation before these stories were told. In all likelihood, Gordon was a composite character modeled after several iron-fisted lawmen who applied their military training to warring on the Underworld.

The Whisperer magazine ran a solid year before falling victim to a sudden reversal of fortunes. A stock market crash in October, 1937, sent a chill through the nation, which had felt that the economy was turning upward. The so-called Roosevelt Recession caused Street & Smith to pull back from its 1936 expansion. *The Whisperer* and its companion title, *The Skipper*, among others, were unceremoniously cancelled with their December, 1937 issues.

In that final issue, editor John L. Nanovic announced that *The Whisperer* would be "combined" with *The Shadow*. He exhorted fans to pick up the December 1, 1937 issue of *The Shadow*, which included the first of these new tales.

Donovan produced the first two of these truncated Whisperers, but by the time the second one landed on Nanovic's desk, newspaperman Alan Hathway had already submitted the first of his. Donovan dropped out and thereafter The Whisperer would be Hathway's creative responsibility. With the conversion to short stories, a significant part of the Whisperer cast dropped out. There was no room for them. So it was goodbye to Mayor van Royston, Sergeant Tom Thorsen, Judge Patrick Kyley and Dunk Smith's faithful dog, Brian Boru.

You can see them all interact one last time in *The Lost Face Murders*. But that was not quite the end of the original Whisperer. In August 1937, Laurence Donovan had turned in a 15th Whisperer novel, "The Crime Prophet," when the magazine was abruptly cancelled, leaving that manuscript to languish unpublished for years.

It had a strange fate. A very strange fate.

In 1940, *The Whisperer* magazine was revived under its original editor, John L. Nanovic. Donovan had moved on to the Thrilling Group, where he was ghosting Phantom Detective stories.

No doubt Nanovic looked over "The Crime Prophet" manuscript for use in the revived *Whisperer*, but the character had been revamped and Donovan's super-pulpy style was years out of vogue at S&S. So Nanovic gave it to someone to rewrite, and the tale ultimately saw print in his *Clues Detective Stories* in 1941, with Commissioner Wildcat Gordon changed to chief of detectives John "Tiger" Fearon, Richard "Quick Trigger" Traeger rechristened Richard Crake, while Tiny Traeger became Helen Crake. The Whisperer himself was written out entirely.

Set in the newspaper world that former reporter Donovan knew so well, the story focuses on a mystery man who predicts the death of notable New Yorkers. After these predictions are printed in a newspaper column, the named subjects are murdered. Once more, Judge Patrick Kyley plays a significant role, only he's renamed Judge Hardin here. The main villain, called "The Murder Prophet," kidnaps him.

We hope to reprint "The Crime Prophet"—the Whisperer story that never was—along with *The Death Roses* and *Murder Brotherhood* in the next volume of *The Whisperer*. •

THE LOST FACE MURDERS

[It was a gruesome trail of weird death that The Whisperer followed when murder struck!]

By CLIFFORD GOODRICH

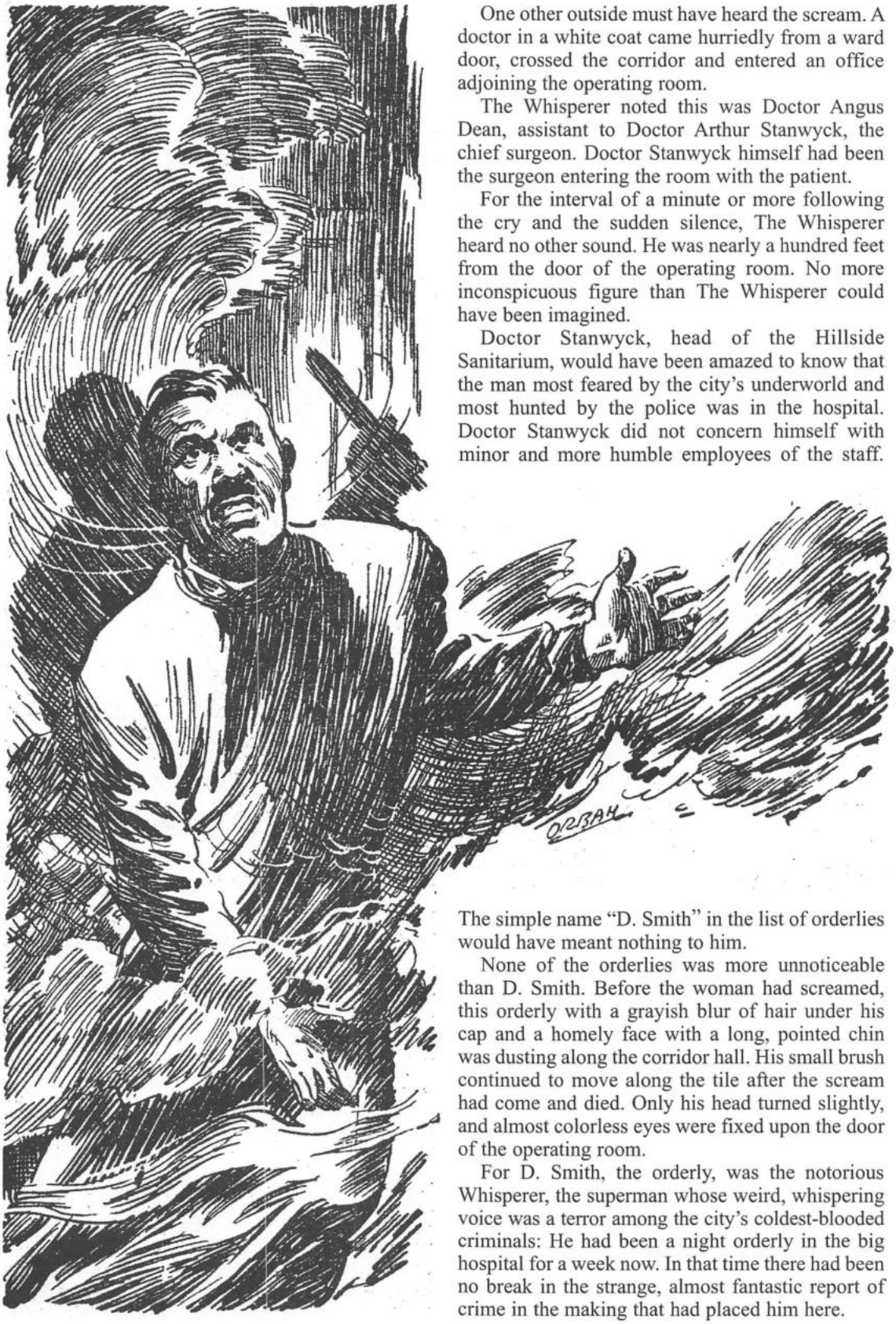
CHAPTER I
WHEN A NURSE SCREAMED

THE WHISPERER heard a woman's choked, shuddering scream. The voice was young, but the cry was nonetheless vibrant with horror. It emanated from the operating room at the end of the long white-tiled corridor of the big hospital. The Whisperer had seen none enter the room except a surgeon, an intern and three nurses in stiff-starched uniforms.

That is, there had been none but these and the figure under the sheet on the table with rubber wheels. The scream could scarcely have come from the patient on the table. The Whisperer knew that the face under the sheet was so thickly swathed in bandages as to make a scream such as the cry which came into the long corridor impossible.

The night supervisor was at her desk. But this was at the end of the two hundred feet of corridor along the private wards farthest from the operating room. Nurses coming on night duty were chattering around the desk. None of these heard the forced, quivering voice that rang out and was cut off abruptly.

A Complete Novel



One other outside must have heard the scream. A doctor in a white coat came hurriedly from a ward door, crossed the corridor and entered an office adjoining the operating room.

The Whisperer noted this was Doctor Angus Dean, assistant to Doctor Arthur Stanwyck, the chief surgeon. Doctor Stanwyck himself had been the surgeon entering the room with the patient.

For the interval of a minute or more following the cry and the sudden silence, The Whisperer heard no other sound. He was nearly a hundred feet from the door of the operating room. No more inconspicuous figure than The Whisperer could have been imagined.

Doctor Stanwyck, head of the Hillside Sanitarium, would have been amazed to know that the man most feared by the city's underworld and most hunted by the police was in the hospital. Doctor Stanwyck did not concern himself with minor and more humble employees of the staff. The simple name "D. Smith" in the list of orderlies would have meant nothing to him.

None of the orderlies was more unnoticeable than D. Smith. Before the woman had screamed, this orderly with a grayish blur of hair under his cap and a homely face with a long, pointed chin was dusting along the corridor hall. His small brush continued to move along the tile after the scream had come and died. Only his head turned slightly, and almost colorless eyes were fixed upon the door of the operating room.

For D. Smith, the orderly, was the notorious Whisperer, the superman whose weird, whispering voice was a terror among the city's coldest-blooded criminals: He had been a night orderly in the big hospital for a week now. In that time there had been no break in the strange, almost fantastic report of crime in the making that had placed him here.

It was unfortunate that The Whisperer could not see beyond the padded, swinging doors leading into the operating room. If he could have seen the first murders, the beginning of horrors that were to hold the great city in their grip might have been prevented.

Before the scream there had been nothing to warn of the thing about to happen. A patient had been wheeled into place beside the gleaming tanks of anesthetic gas. A white-clad nurse with rubber-gloved hands was taking shining scalpels and other instruments from the steaming sterilizer.

The deft, strong fingers of another nurse removed bandages from the face of the patient. The snowy sheet could not entirely conceal the curving outlines of a woman's tempting figure. It would have been remarkable if it had. For hundreds of thousands had applauded the lure of the woman whose face now was being exposed.

The face and figure of "Rana" Ransome had entertained half the world and produced box-office millions. But not even the closest friends of the film star were aware of the plastic surgery now being performed. Rana Ransome was the kind of woman who would be first to see the beginning of crow's feet under her eyes, the wrinkles at the corners of her mouth that had not been the result of laughter.

So the newspapers had reported she was taking a vacation in Europe. Instead, she had come alone to the Hillside Sanitarium. She had hoped the magic of the plastic surgeons might extend her years of attractiveness.

THE nurse with the strong, white fingers pulled the facial bandages entirely away. A student nurse, a novitiate, was assisting Doctor Stanwyck into his operating gown. This young nurse had soft, brown eyes. Her hands trembled, and her gaze wandered to the woman on the table.

Doctor Stanwyck said in a kindly voice, "Steady. Until you are more accustomed to this, keep your eyes away. The operating room is no place for nervousness or excitement."

The surgeon's words had the opposite effect from what he intended. The brown-eyed novitiate stole another swift glance at the fully exposed face of the patient. Then the surgeon's operating gown fell in a stiff, little heap from nerveless hands.

The student nurse screamed. Clamped the back of one small hand against her white teeth and cried out with horror before she collapsed in a huddle of starched uniform beside the gown she had dropped. Doctor Stanwyck reached swiftly down, placing one long-fingered hand over the girl's mouth.

The student nurse had not fainted, and Doctor Stanwyck said, "Stop it, you little fool!"

The older nurse, with bandages in her hands, was standing with her own lips tightly compressed. Her face was pale and tensely drawn, but she had nerve control gained by long experience. Her eyes went to Doctor Stanwyck, then back to the patient's features. She seemed to say, without speaking, "This could not be. Do something!"

Doctor Stanwyck looked steadily at the patient with eyes of almost solid black. Neither these nor his long face betrayed the slightest emotion. But his lips moved, and all could hear his murmured words.

"I trusted Doctor Dean to take my place—"

He motioned to the young intern, saying, "Bring another robe for me quickly."

Then Doctor Stanwyck stepped to the operating table, looking down. A third nurse was standing ready to hand him the shining, sterilized instruments. Little plumes of steam arose from the metal cabinet under the aseptic trays. Doctor Stanwyck's voice was so cold, so steady, he might have been discussing an abstract case written on paper instead of a living woman and what had been one of America's most alluring faces.

"This will be unusually difficult," he stated. "But the mouth will be restored."

The intern was bringing his gown. He was muttering hoarsely to himself.

"All her upper lip is gone. She looks as if she had been made blind!"

"Never mumble, Doctor Anson," said Doctor Stanwyck, slipping long arms through the sleeves of his gown.

Doctor Stanwyck accepted a gleaming scalpel and instructed, "Apply the gas, Doctor Anson." He paused, studying the horror that had been a beautiful face. Then he said, half to himself, "Perhaps Doctor Dean should see this."

He passed the scalpel back to the nurse and turned toward the emergency call board close to the padded, swinging doors leading into the white-tiled corridor.

No person was supposed to be in the observing theater with its clear, paneled windows above the operating room. Plastic surgery at the Hillside Sanitarium dealt with famous and wealthy patients, whose presence here was guarded with the utmost possible secrecy. And so intent were those in the operating room that none glimpsed the beady eyes, the crafty face pressed to the lower corner of one of the operating room windows.

The eyes and the face had been there when the patient had been wheeled into the room. If Doctor Stanwyck and his aides could have seen the gloating, triumphant gleam in the beady orbs, they would have known that one man at least had more than suspected the horror that would be revealed.

And, as Doctor Stanwyck neared the emergency call board, still another pair of eyes peered into the room. These were owned by a doctor in a white

coat who had opened the door of an adjoining office to the barest slit.

NO doubt these two uninvited observers were the first to see the flash of a spark-like flame. Either might have been responsible for that spark. But the spark was so instantly followed by a roaring, whooshing blast of flame that neither furtive watcher could have cried out a warning.

The explosion seemed to come from one of the short tanks of anesthetic gas. None of the tanks should have contained other than the non-combustible gas for usage in the operating room. But there it was. A wasting, rolling cloud of dense blue smoke shot with fire, spreading with frightful force and effect.

THE WHISPERER

The glass of the operating room windows shattered and splintered as if fiery fists had hammered them loose. The beady-eyed observer up there sprang to safety with an oath. But his profane exclamation was more gloating and satisfied than it would have been if inspired wholly by fear. He swayed on his feet, but reached an exit door as fire billowed into the operating room. It might have been seen he was wearing the uniform of an intern.

The scream now coming from the operating room was wholly unlike that which had been first heard by The Whisperer. It was the composite, agonized cry of several voices. The animal-like scream that comes when human flesh is being seared, ending when inhaled flame blisters and burns the lungs.

The room had become an inferno of death. The blasting fire enveloped the sheeted figure on the operating table. Burning cloth added its pungent odor to the smell of burned gas and flesh.

Doctor Stanwyck alone remained on his feet after the blast. His position as he had walked toward the signal board had placed him nearest the swinging corridor doors. The surgeon went forward, partly blown by the explosion, partly propelled by jerking muscles.

The surgeon could feel the hair singeing on the back of his head, a blistering finger of fire drawn across his neck. Then he plunged, head foremost, through the swinging doors, alighting on hands and knees outside.

There could be no doubt but that four persons had died almost instantly. The intern, the patient and two of the nurses who had been standing by the table were enwrapped in a blaze that converted them into human torches. The patient's body rolled from the table. What there had been of horror in the lipless face become more so now, but when the fire had finished, none outside would ever know what had sent the student nurse to the floor.

The position of this brown-eyed nurse on the floor saved her from the upward effect of the blast. If she had fainted, the pain of burns crisping her white skin, the tongues of fire licking at her starched uniform brought her to consciousness. She was whimpering, crawling on her hands and knees blindly across the room.

Across the door that had been opened to a slit at the side swept a wall of fire that for many seconds, perhaps half a minute, prevented any attempt of the man in there to get into the room, if he had so desired.

In the corridor, Doctor Stanwyck staggered to his feet. His clothes were smoking. His face was white and drawn. But he seemed to hear the whimpering sound made by the student nurse crawling under the fire inside.

The chief surgeon swore, and he added a name.

"Doctor Dean—"

Then he lurched back through the swinging doors. Because of the vent given by the shattered windows of the operating room, smoke and flame had rolled upward. The air already was clearing near the floor. Doctor Stanwyck could dimly see the crawling figure of the brown-eyed nurse. She was moving in a little circle, hands groping, throat whimpering, blinded.

THE WHISPERER saw Doctor Stanwyck alight on hands and knees in the corridor. The Whisperer already was running on silent feet when the surgeon arose and dived heroically back into the fire. Nurses and others were crying out at the other end of the long corridor. The blast had rocked the building.

The swinging doors had barely ceased moving when The Whisperer hit them. He ducked low, held his breath, and slitted his eyes. Bodies still writhed around the blazing operating table where it was overturned. The once alluring figure of Rana Ransome, the film star, lay on the floor, a ghastly object from which the concealing sheet had burned away.

Doctor Stanwyck had been quick. So quick that he had the student nurse in his arms and was making for the doors. He collided violently with The Whisperer coming in. The slight figure of the brown-eyed nurse fell from his arms. The nurse's uniform was torn loose at the throat and red, raw flesh had replaced the soft white skin.

Doctor Stanwyck swore, scrambling to his feet.

DOCTOR ARTHUR STANWYCK

The Whisperer caught up the nurse in the crook of one iron arm. Something like a thin, sinuous snake was wrapped around one of the nurse's hands. It was a thin rubber tube. It was long and it had been coiled. Perhaps the nurse had known when her hand encountered it, perhaps she had held onto it unconsciously.

Doctor Stanwyck said, "Here, orderly, I'll take that! Carry her to Ward B!"

The surgeon's hand was extended, grasping the rubber tube. A figure loomed in the smoke behind him so suddenly The Whisperer had no time to glimpse the face. There was a thudding blow and Doctor Stanwyck staggered and fell forward. The Whisperer dropped the nurse, throwing himself toward the mysterious assailant.

A new explosion seemed to burst across The Whisperer's eyes. But the brilliant fire he saw was wholly the result of a skull-crunching instrument that descended upon the top of his head. He did not know when he fell.

BRANDY was biting The Whisperer's throat when he opened his eyes. He saw Doctor Stanwyck sitting up on the floor of the corridor. The surgeon's black eyes were blazing.

"Orderly!" he snapped. "What was the idea of knocking me out?"

The Whisperer rubbed his aching head. He spoke huskily.

"It must have been mutual, then," he stated calmly. "We must have knocked each other out, figuring it that way, Doctor Stanwyck. But it wasn't that way. There was another man in the operating room."

The surgeon's eyes became black, shining slits.

"Another man in there? Yes, orderly, perhaps you're right. Did anyone take a rubber tube from the nurse's hand when she was brought out?"

Heads shook among the crowding interns and nurses. None had seen a rubber tube. One nurse spoke:

"I was with Miss Riley when they carried her to Ward B. I did not see a rubber tube."

Doctor Stanwyck stared at The Whisperer.

"You saw it, orderly. What was it? There was a gas explosion in there. The anesthetic we use could not explode. Those who are dead did not die by accident, but someone was trying to make it appear as if they had."

The Whisperer did not reply. He was looking through the opened swinging doors. One shattered gas tank lay on the floor, its sides split and jagged. There was no doubt of the source of the blast.

For his own reasons, The Whisperer displayed only an apparent brief interest in the bodies in the operating room. They were dead. If anyone had seen anything suspicious, none would ever tell.

The Whisperer was not hurt, only his head ached. He murmured he believed he would knock off for the night. Doctor Stanwyck said, "I hear you are Smith, a new man. I would ask you not to talk too much about this. You were brave enough coming to help me. I will remember it."

The Whisperer nodded rather stupidly, and walked away along the corridor. But his brain was seething. Four persons had just been murdered.

There could be no doubt of the crime. That rubber tube. It had been snatched away by the mysterious figure who had knocked out Stanwyck and himself.

CHAPTER II
DEATH TRAILS THE WHISPERER

SEVERAL minutes had elapsed before The Whisperer had slipped into street clothes. He was now a figure in gray, wearing a round-brimmed hat over blurred, whitish hair. Gray spats and gloves completed his garb. He spoke to no one as he reported off duty for the night.

As The Whisperer started out along the long, third-floor corridor, he could hear police cars sirening up the hill. It was the least of The Whisperer's desires to be stopped and questioned by the police. If he remained, someone would suggest he was the first to reach the operating room after the explosion.

The stairs leading down the back way were just ahead, when a door opened and a nurse came from the door marked "Ward B." The nurse was sobbing.

She was talking to herself.

"It was too much. Doctor Dean should have known that. Her heart couldn't stand it. He gave her an overdose."

The Whisperer went by the nurse. He pushed the door open. Doctor Angus Dean, assistant to the chief surgeon, was standing beside a raised bed. The burned student nurse lay upon it. The glazed, unseeing eyes told she was dead. Doctor Dean was staring at a bright hypodermic syringe held in one hand.

Doctor Dean's dark, blue eyes went over the orderly he had come to know as D. Smith. Another nurse was starting to pull a sheet over the face of the dead novitiate.

"Doctor Dean, shall I call Doctor Stanwyck?" she said.

"Yes, call him," said Doctor Dean in a colorless voice. "Her heart quit, and she was strong. But there was only the normal dose of narcotic."

The nurse was one of the older ones, and she seemed to have her privileges. "But I know symptoms, Doctor Dean, and so do you," she said. "Miss Riley did not die of her burns, or the shock. There must have been an overdose of narcotic in that needle."

Doctor Dean's face had become like a granite mask. His mouth was a hard line above a square, fighting jaw. He seemed to see The Whisperer standing inside the door for the first time.

"What do you want, orderly?" he rapped out. "No one called you. But now that you're here, find Doctor Stanwyck and send him to me as you go out."

The Whisperer nodded, saying nothing. As he went out he heard Doctor Dean say, "I insist that I gave her only the customary dose to ease the terrible pain. You know well enough that Miss Riley was more than—"

The Whisperer closed the door. Doctor Dean's voice had been heavy, as if he had been personally stricken. The Whisperer was thinking fast. He had seen Doctor Dean enter the office adjoining the operating room only a minute or two before the mysterious murder blast. Had Doctor Dean gone through into some other office, or had he been there when the explosion took place?

But at this moment The Whisperer did not intend to linger longer. He heard the dying sirens and the brakes of police cars in the ambulance receiving driveway back of the hospital. He told a nurse Doctor Dean wanted Doctor Stanwyck; then he went quickly down the stairs and slipped from a side doorway, walking toward the driveway and walk at the front.

THE time was only an hour or so after twilight. The Whisperer had been on duty in his role as orderly but a short time when the explosion had occurred. He was sure none suspected him as being other than a hospital orderly who had been on the job but a few days. He wanted his status to remain as it was for the time.

The police would know about that rubber tube. Perhaps they would find some connection had been made with a deadly explosive gas. The Whisperer would learn all that the police knew quickly enough.

For The Whisperer was none other than James "Wildcat" Gordon. "Fighting Wildcat" Gordon, commissioner of police. Former Army officer, hard-boiled, hard-fisted, ruthless when it came to dealing with killers of the underworld, his role of the humble, gray Whisperer had become his way of meeting crooks on their own ground.

"Could this explosion tonight have any connection with the blackmail?" said The Whisperer huskily to himself as his ground-gripping shoes made no sound on the concrete walk. "Doctor Stanwyck says he refused to pay up. He called in the police. Then the racketeers have struck—"

Though The Whisperer thus spoke groping thoughts, he was not so sure. He had quietly assumed the role of an orderly in the big hospital because Doctor Stanwyck had reported to the police a strange blackmail plot directed at the sanitarium. Plastic surgery had become a part of the hospital routine.

Many women, prominent in society, actresses and others, did not desire their friends to know they were having their faces lifted. Doctor Stanwyck had reported to the police—to Commissioner Gordon himself—that a mysterious mob had demanded he pay protection. Otherwise they would blackmail some of his wealthier patients, cut off this source of revenue by making prominent names public.

Telephone calls, unsigned notes delivered directly in the hospital without the use of the mails had, according to Doctor Stanwyck, brought him to the point of fear for himself and his patients.

Commissioner Wildcat Gordon had assured Doctor Stanwyck his best men would seek the identity of the racketeers. He had complimented the surgeon on having the courage and the good sense to come directly to the police.

And the day after that interview, the humble D. Smith had been engaged for the menial work of a hospital orderly.

At this minute, walking slowly down the hospital driveway along a border of oak trees which cast a deep shadow, The Whisperer desired only to be out of range of the regular police inquiry, in his present role. It was his intention to reach his nearby parked

coupé, make a swift change and reappear as Wildcat Gordon on the heels of his own police.

He was convinced that the police would discover little of value. Only The Whisperer might get at the fiend behind tonight's ghastly explosion murders by retaining his inside role of an orderly. Suddenly The Whisperer halted, struck simultaneously by a new thought and the grating slap of a shoe sole on the concrete walk behind him.

There was a shadow as he turned. The owner of the slapping shoe disappeared among the oak trees where the darkness was opaque. But the new thought remained with The Whisperer for a few seconds.

Why had one of the nurses screamed a minute or two before the blast of the explosion had rocked the hospital?

Perhaps Doctor Stanwyck could explain that. He filed the thought. But the shadow of the man among the trees caused dry shrubbery to crackle. The Whisperer's keen ears made out the movement of one man, then another, over to one side and between him and the curving street that led down the hill toward the city.

Apparently satisfied there was no one behind him, The Whisperer walked slowly on. But he was juggling possibilities. He had no doubt but that he was being trailed. And, as the humble hospital orderly, there could be no reason for this, except because of what he might have discovered in the operating room after the explosion.

He considered. Except for Doctor Stanwyck, there was apparently no living witness to what might have taken place in the room prior to the blast. He had entered and been knocked out. Now he was being trailed. He decided against going straight to his coupé and transforming his appearance to that of Wildcat Gordon. The shadows moving through the shrubbery were too close to him for that.

THEN The Whisperer saw the closed car. It was a long, powerful sedan. It had been parked under the trees in the street, away from the lights of the hospital driveway. A uniformed chauffeur was out, tinkering with the motor, which was running. The chauffeur's cap was pulled low over his eyes.

"So that's the answer," murmured The Whisperer. "The man inside didn't make it a finished job when he hit me, so a nice, little one-way ride is next on the program."

Someone in the hospital must have passed a fast tip to an outside mob. It looked as if this could be nothing less than a connection with the attempted extortion against Doctor Stanwyck. The Whisperer became sure of it when he saw the metallic glitter of a gun inside the window of the sedan's rear door.

His number had gone up. He was on the spot. And he grinned, his long upper lip looking queer above his pointed chin. For he was not about to be taken for a ride as The Whisperer, long sought by mobsters and police alike. This unexpected visitation was intended for a humble hospital orderly because he might know too much.

A ghostly chuckle came to The Whisperer's lips. He had suddenly decided that in about half a minute he would change all that. He walked steadily toward the car, as if he were dumb and suspected nothing. The last row of shading trees was beside him. More police cars were arriving back of the sanitarium.

If he kept on, he must pass close to the bending chauffeur. There was no doubt but that he would be invited into that car.

"O.K.," The Whisperer murmured. "You want something to think about, I'll give it to you mugs."

The gray Whisperer left the concrete walk and merged with the trees so swiftly a gun trigger could not have been pulled. He glided silently beyond the trees into thick shrubbery. His two pursuing shadows could be heard blundering toward the car.

A weird, chilling whisper seemed to come from nowhere. It penetrated among the trees with eerie effect, as if it came from someone floating in the air.

"Do not touch that orderly! Stay where you are, or you will die! The Whisperer speaks!"

The chauffeur beside the car motor whipped around. There was growled alarm in his voice.

"Listen, Butch! You hear that? Doc is off on the wrong foot! If we're up against The Whisperer, I'm—"

THE WHISPERER did not hear the rest of this. One of his shadowing pursuers was coming straight toward him, and he had started to run. Here in the darkness The Whisperer felt sure of himself. Two pistols with odd, clumsy silencers had whipped into his hands. But he did not intend to kill anyone now.

One man was upon him, almost stepping on one hand when The Whisperer snapped erect and sliced down with one silenced pistol barrel. The man uttered a groan and dropped, out cold.

"Hey, Tanker!" called out the other man cautiously. "Where are you? Did you hear that whisper?"

The Whisperer pointed one of the silenced pistols. There was a hissing sound as if compressed air had been released. But a slug glanced off a tree and *zvheed* viciously into the darkness.

"Hi, Butch! Mallory! Up here, quick!"

The man among the trees halted, was calling out. That hissing, venomous explosion of the silenced pistols came again. The Whisperer could see the top of the mob sedan. His bullets whined off of metal. The Whisperer believed the men in the car

would not venture into the trees with bullets singing from unheard guns.

He was convinced that he could drive them off, leaving the mobster he had knocked out in his hands. Then it would be but a matter of his own sweating methods and his prisoner would talk. When he finished, he was convinced he would know much more about this hospital mob.

In the meantime, those who had heard him would quickly report that The Whisperer had struck again. Such a report would reach the police. Under the cover of the confusion this would create, The Whisperer could work unhampered by some of his own men.

This was one of The Whisperer's oldest tricks: setting his police upon himself.

Now his bullets were having the effect he intended. He emptied the pistols, shifted in new magazines with a flick of a thumb. For a short interval his rods were as effective as a mob "chopper." The sedan ground into gear and the motor stepped up. The car slipped away. The man who had called out was running away among the trees.

The Whisperer pocketed his pistols. Then he had another thought and tossed the weapons quietly into the bushes. He slung the unconscious mobster over one shoulder and edged farther into the trees, making for the street and his parked coupé.

It was unfortunate he had not been able to see the doors of the sedan just before it had pulled out from under his fusillade. Those doors had opened and three men had rolled out. They had darted across the pavement and into the shrubbery.

The Whisperer became aware of the trick a split second too late. He was about to step into the open to reach his parked coupé when a sinewy, curving arm shot out from the bushes and was crooked under his chin.

The Whisperer dropped the senseless mobster and attempted to turn. But other hands jerked his feet from under him.

The driving weight of three men bore him to the ground, with knees and elbows grinding into his ribs and stomach. One flat hand slapped sticky tape over his mouth. He was rolled again and his arms pulled behind him, with more lengths of tape securing them.

Then The Whisperer went out under a padded blow that could have come from only a cushioned "sapper." In the meantime, the sedan had made a quick turn a block away and was now being pulled alongside the curb.

One mobster swore, "Damn it, get goin'! It's the orderly Doc said to pick up! I don't know what in hell The Whisperer's got to do with him, but I'm not waitin' to find out! Doc wants to have a talk with this punk!"

The sedan's door slapped shut and it rolled away.

IN the meantime, an oldish, bald-domed man with faded, squinting blue eyes was with the police squad in the Hillside Sanitarium. He was in shabby plainclothes and was acting in a free manner that proved he was not one of the police. He had just heard Doctor Stanwyck make a report to Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton, in charge of the squad.

"There was an orderly named Smith who was the first man to reach the room after the explosion," said the surgeon. "He said he wanted off, and I didn't think at the moment to hold him here. But I'll try and find out his address."

The oldish, bald man walked away, muttering to himself.

"Damn! I reckon that dental plate's gone an' got Wildcat into another jam! I wished I'd never made the danged thing! I've seen some murders, but I ain't never wantin' to see another one like this!"

The oldish man was known as "Quick Trigger." He was Dick Traeger, a retired deputy of police. For years he had been virtually a father to Wildcat Gordon, in his Army days and later when he had started cracking the town wide open as the toughest commissioner who had ever been in office.

Quick Trigger had made the odd dental plate which was responsible for the Whisperer's uncanny voice, and which completely altered his face. Quick Trigger had made a hobby of disguises. The dental plate had been an accident. But he had created The Whisperer, and many times he had regretted this when danger threatened Wildcat.

Deputy Bolton was a long-nosed, small-mouthed copper. For years he had hoped to be appointed commissioner. Then Wildcat Gordon had been put into office over his head, and over the head of Mayor Van Royston, who had been elected by a reform element because of his high social standing.

Mayor Van Royston had arrived with the police squad. He was beside Deputy Bolton.

"You say, Doctor Stanwyck, you asked Commissioner Gordon for protection a week ago and you've heard nothing from him since?" said Mayor Van Royston.

Doctor Stanwyck nodded unhappily, "Nothing has happened that I know about, mayor. Perhaps Commissioner Gordon has been investigating quietly."

"Gordon has been out of the city for more than a week," stated Deputy Bolton unpleasantly.

CHAPTER III
"YOU'RE A FOOL TO TALK!"

OLD Quick Trigger stood aside and said nothing. He was aware that Wildcat must have had a good

reason for disappearing right after the explosion. He would not want the police to know about the role he had been enacting in the hospital.

Quick Trigger expected Wildcat Gordon to appear any minute in his own cocksure identity as commissioner. Probably Wildcat would raise several kinds of hell with Doctor Stanwyck for permitting the orderly named Smith to leave the place before the police arrived.

Doctor Stanwyck said to Mayor Van Royston, "This is the most terrible thing in my experience. The Hillside Sanitarium is on the verge of doing great good for crippled children. Our other plastic surgery has been the means of carrying on a good work. Now Rana Ransome has been killed by an explosion of gas. But the gas we use in operation cannot be exploded. An explosive cylinder must have somehow been substituted."

A detective sergeant with a square, wooden face that looked like it had been carved out of old battleship planking came from the blasted operating room. He was Sergeant Tom Thorsen, who had once been in the Army and who was the chief standby of Wildcat Gordon in the department. Thorsen's face seldom showed any emotion.

"The explosion was caused by illuminating gas, hooked up from the pipe supplying the kitchen," he said calmly. "I found a valve in the pipe behind the broken wall of the operating room. That valve had been tapped in, but it has been closed since the explosion. What do you know about it, doctor?"

Doctor Stanwyck stared at Sergeant Thorsen as if speech had left him.

Then he said, "That accounts for a rubber tube that disappeared. I did not want to report it, gentlemen, but I was knocked out and the tube was taken from this Smith, the orderly, after I found it in the hands of a young nurse."

"Well, well!" snapped Deputy Bolton. "Maybe it'd be a good idea to let us have a talk with this nurse! I thought everybody in the room was killed!"

Doctor Stanwyck shook his head slowly. He appeared reluctant to say what was called forth.

"I'm sorry, but Miss Riley—the nurse who had the tube—is dead. I was bringing her out when I was knocked down. She was badly burned, but not fatally. Doctor Dean attended her and—"

Doctor Stanwyck ceased speaking abruptly. Another man in a surgeon's coat with straight-seeing blue eyes walked up. His square jaw was thrust out.

"I attended Miss Riley, and she is dead," he said calmly. "She did not die of burns or shock, but of an overdose of narcotic. I gave her a hypodermic to ease her pain and—"

"And she can't talk!" interrupted Deputy Bolton. "You're tellin' us you administered a death dose of damned drug an' that our only possible witness is dead?"

"I did not administer all the narcotic," said Doctor Dean. "And I did not know she had been given a hypodermic before she was put into my hands. The second needle was too close upon the first."

Deputy Bolton narrowed his small eyes.

Doctor Stanwyck said, "No one could have given the dead nurse a hypodermic before she was placed in Doctor Dean's hands."

"Where were you at the time of the explosion, Doctor Dean?" snapped Deputy Bolton.

"I was in another part of—"

A hard voice cut in. An intern with beady eyes and a slanted mouth smiled mockingly at Doctor Dean.

"I was running toward the operating room right after the blast," said the intern. "I saw Doctor Dean coming out of there. He had been down in the operating room. I went into the place without Doctor Dean seeing me. This was sticking out from under a chair."

The intern produced a thin, long rubber tube from under his coat. One end of the tube was burned. Deputy Bolton's long nose sniffed. Others could smell the odor of gas still clinging to the tube.

Doctor Dean's teeth clicked together. Before the nearby police could interfere, Doctor' Dean's right fist shot out and connected with the intern's chin.

"I was in the operating room right after the explosion!" he grated. "But Doctor Revers, the intern here, is a damned liar, and he knows it! I never saw that tube before!"

"But you did give the only inside witness, except Doctor Stanwyck, an overdose of drug!" snapped Henry Bolton. "Doctor Dean, you are under arrest on the charge of murder!"

"But, gentlemen," said Doctor Stanwyck, spreading his hands, "this is all impossible! Doctor Dean has been with me for five years! I'll admit this looks like someone inside the hospital, but then—"

Doctor Stanwyck permitted sudden apprehension to come into his eyes.

"Great glory!" he exploded. "That orderly! That Smith! He's been here only a week, and he was the first man in the death room! In fact, I had an idea it was him who knocked me down! And perhaps I was right!"

OLD Quick Trigger mumbled to himself and shook his head. He kept an eye on the entrance door. Why did not Wildcat Gordon show up? None but the commissioner himself could change the course of the investigation.

At this moment a phone call came for Deputy Bolton. Headquarters was calling. Deputy Bolton exclaimed profanely into the receiver. He came back to the group, walking stiffly.

"Mayor Van Royston," he said, "I have to report that The Whisperer was heard on the hospital grounds less than half an hour ago. Sergeant Thorsen, it is stated The Whisperer was seen with the orderly named Smith just after he left the hospital. Get outside and see what you can find."

When Deputy Thorsen returned, he reported there was blood on the sidewalk near the hospital driveway. He said a car had been standing there, and nearby shrubbery showed where there had been a fight.

Deputy Henry Bolton never missed an opportunity to stick a feather in his own cap. He could solve puzzling cases faster and louder and wronger than any other living man.

"That's it! I've got it!" he announced, with his round mouth pursed up. "The Whisperer an' his mob have attempted to blackmail you, Doctor Stanwyck! They had to have someone inside! They put this orderly, Smith, on the job! Now how did they get their tipoffs on cases?"

Deputy Bolton waited, a thin smile crossing his face.

"Well, tell you about that. Doctor Dean, here, would be the man who could play fingerman on these face-liftin' cases! Maybe this nurse, this Miss Riley, saw too much! That's it! So Doctor Dean bumps her off with a hypodermic and then says somebody's made a mistake! Take him out, boys!"

Doctor Stanwyck started to protest, but Mayor Van Royston smiled.

"Someday Henry Bolton will be commissioner," he stated. "You see how he takes hold of things. This Whisperer has been regarded as a supercrook for a long time. Now when Henry finds your orderly, Doctor Stanwyck, he will have a direct lead to The Whisperer. That's what I call using your head."

Steel snapped on Doctor Dean's wrists. The blue-eyed surgeon kept his teeth tightly together and said nothing. Old Quick Trigger groaned and grunted to Sergeant Thorsen.

"Every time Henry Bolton uses his head the splinters peel off the wood and get stuck into the wrong people. I'm going home and wait for Wildcat."

Then an intern called Deputy Bolton back to the telephone. A voice from headquarters said, "We have a flash that two men have been killed in a jewel holdup at Fortieth and Pine Street. The Countess Sergund was robbed of two hundred grand in diamonds."

Old Quick Trigger possessed rare intuition. Years in the department before his retirement had trained him to add up two and two and get any number of answers. Wildcat Gordon had not appeared at the hospital. If the jaunty commissioner was not dead or a prisoner, then he would be one of the first to reach the scene of the holdup.

Quick Trigger clicked his teeth as he recalled the report of blood outside the hospital. But he was first outside and into a coupé that bore, by way of courtesy, flashing red lights and a siren.

"Fortieth and Pine—damned deserted spot—"

The address was in a wholesale district with little traffic at night. But it was one of the main streets leading along West River to an exclusive club, the North Shore Club.

Quick Trigger heard police cars get away behind him. But they took another route toward the scene of the holdup. The retired deputy was muttering profanely.

"That Doctor Dean has Scotch blue eyes—damn Henry Bolton—he never knows when a man looks honest—I'll betcha Wildcat would—"

Quick Trigger ceased muttering and attended strictly to the speed of his little car.

FOUR persons occupied the expensive sports car which turned from Fortieth into Pine Street only a few minutes before the Countess Sergund holdup, had been reported to Deputy Bolton. The driver had removed a silk topper, letting blond hair blow in the wind. His face was clean cut, with dancing gray eyes. He was singing a bit drunkenly.

But few in the city would have failed to identify Tommy Jones, heir to the fortune of Morton Longus, eccentric multimillionaire. The sweet, gentle-voiced girl beside him would have been recognized from society page pictures as Mary Matthews. She was the orphaned ward of Morton Longus, and Tommy was crazy about her.

A man and another girl occupied the rear seat. The man was Jerome Boglund, clubman: polo player, and a steady-nerved runner-up of champions at golf. He had been a close friend of Tommy's for a long time. Theda Ross, his fiancée, recently from Boston, sat beside him. She had a harder voice than Mary Matthews, but it was toned down by a Back Bay accent.

A long closed car was running ahead of them as they reached the intersection at Fortieth and Pine. Both cars were clipping off a good forty, there being little traffic. The sidewalks, however, were well-filled, the output of a show just closing at a movie theater.

Tommy was turned, talking to Jerry Boglund, when Mary clutched his arm. "Look out, Tommy!"

Tommy jerked around, jammed his right foot down automatically.

"Damn!" he let out. "That truck driver's crazy!"

Jerry Boglund leaned forward, gripping the back of the front seat.

"The fool must be drunk! He almost hit that other car! He—Hold hard, Tommy! It looks like something else again!"

Theda Ross emitted a little scream. Tommy slewed his car around and ran close to a sidewalk curb. The chauffeur of the car ahead had burned rubber coming to a stop. A big furniture truck skidded on surface tracks and just missed crumpling a fender on an elevated pillar.

The truck blocked the nose of the car ahead, and a liveried chauffeur shouted a discreet oath and started to boil from his seat. The nearby darkened doors seemed to erupt men with caps and hats pulled low over their eyes. They surrounded the halted car so quickly the chauffeur had no time to act.

A woman screamed shrilly. A man with a long arm was on the running board, and Tommy Jones saw him shoot a straight-armed fist into a woman's face. Tommy was quick. He was snapping open the door of his sports car. But two men appeared as if they had come up from the pavement.

"Hold everythin', wise guy!" grated a hard voice. "An' we ain't playin' marbles, either!"

The rod shoving into Tommy's neck was convincing that it was not meant for a game of marbles. Jerry Boglund thrust himself forward. A flattened hand slapped its palm across his face and knocked off his silk topper.

"You, too, high hat!" came another metallic voice. "Sit tight—or else!"

The twin of the other rod made a dent in Jerry's neck. Theda Ross set her teeth over her knuckles and widened her dark eyes. Tommy was perhaps a bit too drunk, or he may suddenly have been a little too sober. One hidden fist clenched and started up.

Mary Matthews trapped his wrist. She whispered huskily.

"Tommy! Please! Oh!"

TOMMY dropped his fist. Mary's exclamation had been called forth by the sickening crunch of a reversed rod on the head of the chauffeur in the held-up car. The blow must have cracked the chauffeur's skull wide open. He lay suddenly like an empty sack over the door of his car.

Other men were pulling two richly dressed women from the car ahead. One was gray-haired and the other was young. Both were wearing chains of pearls with gleaning pendants. Other jewels were on their fingers.

The motor of the stalled truck was setting up a roaring racket. This was, no doubt, intended to cover up other sounds. The older woman with the jewels was a game one. Her clawed hands tore at the face of the nearest man. This thug let go with a right-hander and dropped her to the sidewalk.

Tommy Jones started to rear up again. Jerry Boglund caught his collar. "Don't be crazy, Tommy!" he warned. "The girls—"

"You're smart, high hat!" rasped one of the men. "Think of the dames, dumb guy! They might—see!"

His words had been punctuated by the shrill of a police whistle and the riveting burst of a single machine gun. A uniformed copper had been running, service gun already in his hand. The ugly voice of a "chopper" stopped him, caused his knees to buckle and his arms to fold over his riddled stomach.

The thugs surrounding the two women were stripping jewels roughly from them. The younger woman screamed with pain as her own gems tore into her soft skin. Tommy Jones was swearing in a low voice. He was looking into the rattish eyes of the man nearest him.

"Stop it, Tommy!" gritted Jerry. "Hell! That's Countess Sergund and her niece! They were at the club for dinner!"

Their gems and money taken, their clothes partly torn from their shoulders, the countess and the younger woman were picked up and pushed back into the car where their chauffeur lay dead. The policeman was but a heap of blue in the middle of the street and was of no service.

TOMMY JONES

That one burst of the chopper had magically cleared the pavements of all pedestrians. The two cars and the truck were the only machines in sight. The driver of the truck was backing out, pointing for a getaway out Pine Street.

Nearly a dozen mobsters were now running away. Two closed cars moved, crossed the intersection on Fortieth Street and speeded up as the killers rolled onto running boards and inside. Everything was over in less than the slow turn of one bloody minute.

"Don't make no funny moves!" barked one of the men who had held up Tommy's car. "An' I could use that watch!"

His free hand roughly snapped the strap of an expensive wristwatch. Then the two men were darting away, making for a side alley, where perhaps they had another car hidden.

Then Tommy Jones exploded, jumping from his seat.

"Smart, hell! I'd know both those thugs anywhere, any time! I had a look at their faces! I'll give the police a lead they can't miss!"

Mary Matthews was, no doubt, icy with terror. For the first time in her sheltered existence she had seen men killed, women beaten, death blood running. She stared at Tommy, and her voice choked.

"No! No! Tommy, you wouldn't! They would kill you! You mustn't remember anything! Wait! I'm going to the Countess!"

Theda Ross spoke in her throaty Back Bay voice.

"Mary's right, Tommy! You might be hurt! Every day there's something in the papers about someone foolish enough to talk!"

TOMMY pivoted, staring at the girls. He was now cold sober, white of face and mad all the way to the roots of his blond hair.

"You're women! Of course, you will keep out of this! But I'm a citizen, free, white and twenty-one! Look at that poor devil of a policeman!"

Jerry was out beside Tommy, a hand on his arm. Police sirens were at last screaming alarm from surrounding blocks.

"The girls are right, Tommy," said Jerry calmly. "You're angry and a little sick right now. So am I. But I couldn't be sure of the men's faces, and neither could you. Moreover, I'm not anxious to become a dead public hero. Don't talk to the cops, Tommy, until you think it over."

Tommy pulled his arm from Jerry's hand.

"Think what over? That dead copper over there, and the driver hanging over the door? I've done my thinking! You drive through after a polo ball when all hell's coming down on you, Jerry! But I see your point! The girls must not be involved! You take my car and drive them home!"

Mary and Theda had slipped from the car. They were over with Countess Sergund and her sobbing niece. Police squad cars braked into the intersection. Coppers boiled out and surrounded the dead man in uniform and the murdered chauffeur.

A patrol captain confronted Tommy and Jerry Boglund.

"Know about this? Get a line on any mugs?"

The captain's gaze swept over their dinner clothes, over to the silk hats and the imported sports car.

"No, you wouldn't see anything," he said, low and bitterly. "I see you are gentlemen who wouldn't want to be mixed up in—"

"We were in the dark when our car was stopped and two men held us," spoke up Jerry quickly. "We could not see their faces."

CHAPTER IV
CRAZY TOMMY JONES

TOMMY JONES looked straight at his friend, Jerry Boglund.

"He was in the back seat, officer, and he could not see the men's faces," he stated calmly. "But the light was shining for me, and I saw them both. I can identify them, and I will. Jerry, you drive the girls on home. I'm staying here."

Jerry Boglund was voicing further protest when the police captain gripped his arm. His voice was hard but understanding.

"Sure, I know, Mr. Boglund. I saw you play polo once and I know you have guts. You can take the young women home. I've seen you play polo, too, Mr. Jones. I thought you were a little cautious going through for the ball. Maybe I was wrong."

Tommy gave him a hard grin.

"A game's one thing, officer, and murder's another."

Rarely had the police so ready and willing a witness in a mob killing. Jerry Boglund was muttering oaths as he drove away with Mary Matthews and Theda Ross in Tommy's car.

One veteran copper looked at Tommy Jones and shook his head. The bareheaded playboy in his dinner clothes now was showing cold, gray eyes.

"Maybe he'll do it," said the veteran copper. "But they always crack up when the mob turns on the heat."

"All right!" snapped the captain. "You climb into a squad car, Mr. Jones, and I'll have some of the boys stay by you until we've cleaned up! Commissioner Gordon will want to see you!"

"I'll gladly describe the two men to the commissioner," said Tommy.

In the meantime, Quick Trigger's coupé was skidding corners, covering the five miles from the Hillside Sanitarium to Fortieth and Pine. His hope

was strong that Wildcat Gordon might have been delayed by the break of the holdup. Wildcat would be on the scene, if he got the word.

QUICK TRIGGER would have been dumfounded if he could have known that Wildcat Gordon was at the scene of the holdup murders. He was there before a shot was fired. In the person of The Whisperer, he had come to his senses lying on the jouncing floor of a furniture truck. His tape-wrapped body was slammed forward, and his head took a new bump as the truck had skidded and jammed an elevated pillar.

The Whisperer's mouth was closed by tape, but his ears were extra keen.

There was a single driver on the truck seat, the back of which opened into the big van. This driver remained in place as curses, screams and shooting came in quick succession.

The blood pounded madly through The Whisperer's body as he fought the unyielding tape and accomplished nothing. He managed to hunch to one side and see with one colorless eye through a crack in the truck wall near the floor.

Never in his months as police commissioner had Wildcat Gordon been held more helplessly or had his rage been greater. The driver's ugly face leered at the helpless man when the chopper cut down the heroic copper.

The Whisperer's anger became a mad fever when he discovered he could not see clearly enough to later recall the faces of any of the mob. Even the face of the truck driver was in darkness. Perhaps two minutes was all that had gone by, but it seemed to The Whisperer as if an hour had passed.

"Now we're going places!" snarled the truck driver, backing the big van. "We've got a doctor who knows how to make people talk! He'll be waitin' to have a session with you, sweetheart! He don't let orderlies butt in on his game!"

This was the single cue The Whisperer received. His captors took him to be what he had played—the hospital orderly. No doubt they imagined The Whisperer had attempted his rescue and vanished. The truck started ahead and gathered speed. The Whisperer was aware of their location. The truck was rolling out Pine Street.

The Whisperer's muscles strained, but this availed nothing—until he encountered the nail sticking up from the floor. Skin tore away along with several layers of tape around his wrists. But still he was held.

The truck was rocking along surface tracks under the elevated. Suddenly the wail of a police siren sounded. A car was coming, head-on, toward the big truck. The Whisperer identified that siren. It had a slightly different tone from the other police horns.

Quick Trigger! It could be no other, unless some one had stolen one of their several coupés.

"Wildcat Gordon!" ripped from the truck driver's lips. "An' he's all alone! Now ain't that too nice! This'll be one rub-out—"

The Whisperer could feel the slight swing of the truck. Old Quick Trigger must have been doing sixty or better under the El tracks. The mob driver had let out a menacing laugh. There was death in it. The truck and the little car were so pointed that a head-on meeting would be simple enough.

The crushing weight and heavier bumper of the truck would suffer little damage from such an impact. The siren indicated the coupé could not be more than half a block away. With a tremendous heave and a tearing of skin on one wrist, The Whisperer ripped away the last layer of tape. He pulled at his tape-wound legs.

There they came. The intermittent, flashing red lights, like two eyes of death. They were less than fifty yards away. Quick Trigger unknowing that a Juggernaut of murder was about to trap him, crush him to bloody jelly against the El's steel pillars.

"Now take it, damn you!"

The truck driver's hoarse oath was accompanied by a twist of his steering wheel. But the truck did not swerve into the coupé. Hands like the clamping teeth of a bulldog fastened into the driver's neck. They let go and a lightning thrust of The Whisperer's arms jammed the driver's face down upon the wheel. The wheel turned.

The truck driver's body left The Whisperer's hands. The wildly cursing mobster crashed through the windshield, and his head was like an eggshell filled with whitish blood as it pulped against the iron of an El column.

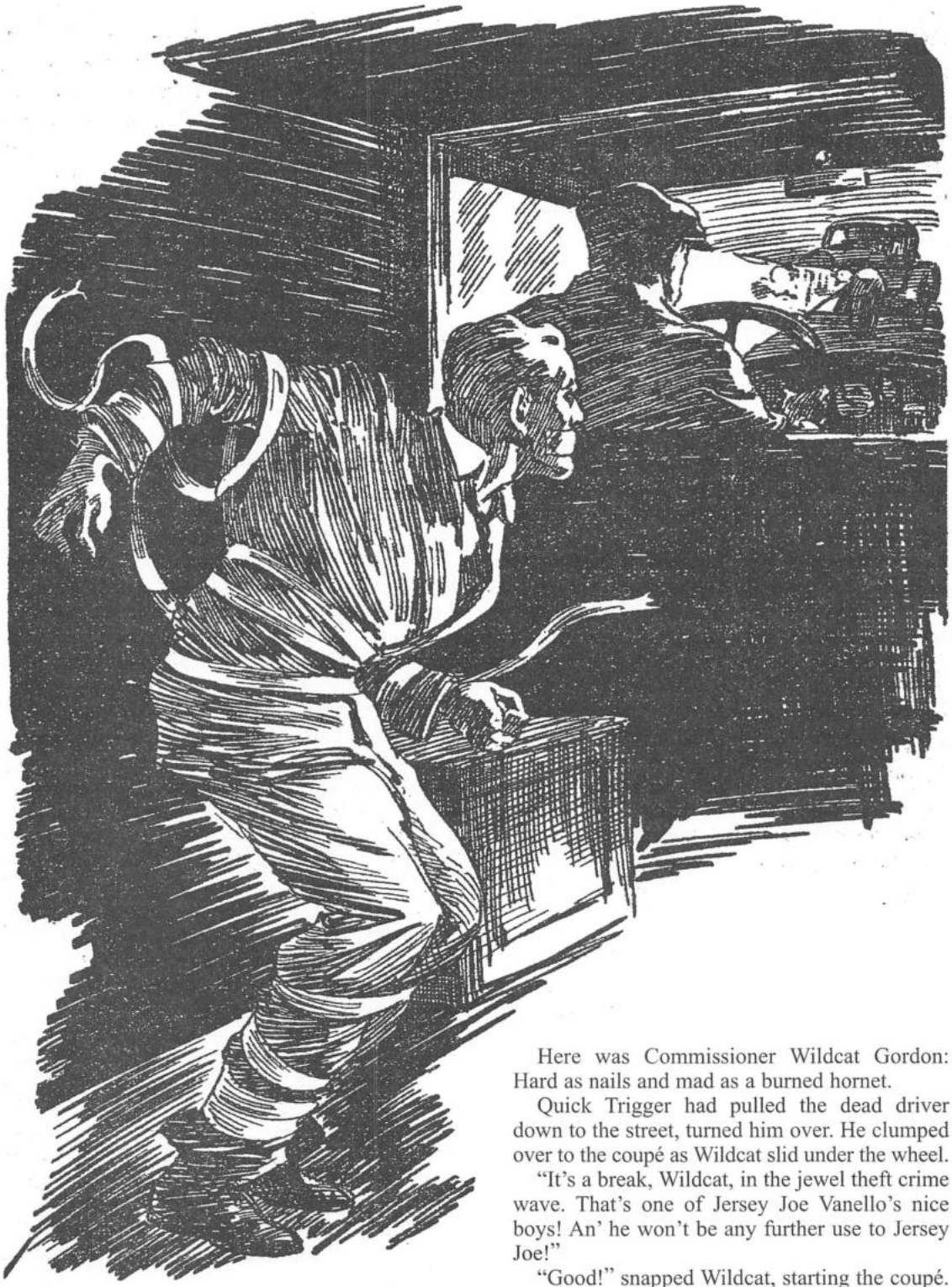
Quick Trigger left a rubber burn for fifty yards. He came out of the coupé, an old-fashioned service revolver swinging in a gnarled hand. The Whisperer had braced himself back of the truck seat. The heavy motor was jammed all the way back, but The Whisperer suffered only a bloody nose.

Quick Trigger's lower jaw dropped, and he said, "Damn, if I ain't seein' things!" as The Whisperer tore tape from his mouth, rolled over the truck seat and rapped out, "Let's get going! There's been another jewel holdup and a couple of murders! The same gang that's been spottin' damn fool rich women who haven't any better sense than to make walkin' display cases of themselves!"

The Whisperer sprang into the seat of the halted coupé. He was making a swift transformation of his appearance. Items came from the pockets of the coupé. Powder that had made his red hair appear a whitish blur under a round hat, was brushed off.

A jaunty new Army hat replaced the other and was cocked over one eye. Gray clothes, gray spats

were zippered off. There appeared a loud and violent checkered suit. A fresh carnation went into the coat lapel and a flaming red tie was put in a place, all within the space of a minute.



With a tremendous heave, The Whisperer ripped away the last layer of tape.

Here was Commissioner Wildcat Gordon: Hard as nails and mad as a burned hornet.

Quick Trigger had pulled the dead driver down to the street, turned him over. He clumped over to the coupé as Wildcat slid under the wheel.

"It's a break, Wildcat, in the jewel theft crime wave. That's one of Jersey Joe Vanello's nice boys! An' he won't be any further use to Jersey Joe!"

"Good!" snapped Wildcat, starting the coupé. "And Jersey Joe himself probably is doing a song and dance in some nightclub all the time!

He can build the sweetest alibis of any rat in the rackets! Let's go!"

Wildcat did not question the identification. Quick Trigger had a brain that had ticketed ninety percent of the mugs on record. When he said that the thug was one of "Jersey Joe's" boys there could be doubt of it.

Wildcat said, "I was grabbed outside the Hillside Sanitarium under the belief that they were snatching a mere orderly. They said a doctor wanted to have a talk with me. Then I woke up in that truck. Dammit, Quick Trigger, this is a funny one! But it may be a straight lead to the hospital blackmail mob and the explosion there tonight—"

"Too late, an' you ain't doin' so good, Wildcat," grinned the older man. "Deputy Bolton's broken all that. He's locked up the killer and is looking for The Whisperer to pin the extortion rap on him. He's booked a Doctor Dean on a murder charge."

Wildcat let out one explosive, "Damn!" Then his teeth clicked shut.

THE police were still "cleaning up" at the scene of the holdup. Within two minutes, Wildcat had the full story of the affair. He looked at the young man in dinner clothes and studied his level gray eyes a long ten seconds.

"So you're Tommy Jones, the newspaper playboy nephew of Morton Longus?" said Wildcat. "And you think now you want to put the finger on two of this killer's gang. I said killer gang, Tommy."

A slow, hard grin across Tommy's clean-cut mouth matched that of Wildcat.

"All right, Commissioner Gordon, you don't think much of a playboy, so rub it in," he said quietly. "Sure, I make the front pages every time I stick my head up for air in a nightclub, or take the girl friend for a dinner date. First time I've met you, Wildcat Gordon. Surprises you to have a playboy offer—"

"I'm shockproof against surprises," interjected Wildcat. "Even if I don't believe you'll stick. Suppose we whirl over to headquarters?"

Tommy's gray eyes brightened to bits of steel at Wildcat's words and he set a nice square jaw. Wildcat grinned broadly. If he could keep Tommy as mad as that long enough, they might go places.

THE pompous Mayor Van Royston in his striped trousers and his topper, pounded his chest and pushed his retreating chin as far forward as it would go. Wildcat Gordon had come into his headquarters office with Tommy Jones walking beside him. Old Quick Trigger was trailing along.

"Where have you been, Gordon, while Deputy Bolton has been cleaning up one of the worst murder mysteries, we've ever had?" piped the mayor. "And what are you doing with Tommy Jones? Hello, Tommy. Saw you at dinner with Jerry Boglund and the girls tonight."

Mayor Van Royston never lost an opportunity to impress common coppers and others with his high social status. Wildcat ignored the mayor, walked over and cocked brilliant, yellow shoes on the corner of his desk, picking up the department phone.

"Send in all the gallery stuff on the mob hooked up with Jersey Joe Vanello," he instructed. "All the mugs ever hooked up with him."

Wildcat replaced the phone, tamped tobacco in his pipe and sent a cloud of reeking smoke into the air.

"I said, 'What are you doing with Tommy Jones,' Gordon?" said Mayor Van Royston in a decidedly truculent tone.

"Tommy thinks he wants to put the finger on a pair of killer rats," stated Wildcat. "He was close to Countess Sergund when she was held up and her chauffeur was killed along with O'Malley of the patrol."

Mayor Van Royston's rather ingrown face suddenly became a deep shade of red. He strutted over to Wildcat's desk.

"I wouldn't obstruct justice, but this looks like a case for your police to solve! That's what your men are for, Gordon! You are paid to risk your lives! But Tommy Jones? Why, he is a member of my club, the North Shore! He's the nephew of Morton Longus! He's—"

"You can either shut up or get the hell out of my office," said Wildcat with grinning cheerfulness. Then his colorless eyes glinted and his face hardened.

"So you wouldn't obstruct justice?" he snapped. "But nice mealy-mouthed, lily-fingered citizens like you are the reason for mobs like that of Jersey Joe being at large! O'Malley is dead!"

"Tommy Jones here may have a better rating in the social register and bluer blood than O'Malley, but I've got a hunch Tommy's blood is just as red, and he's got the same kind of guts, I hope!"

"Thanks, Wildcat Gordon," said Tommy quickly. "Sorry, Van Royston. I've often wondered what I'd do when I've read of good citizens turning yellow over rats showing their teeth. Now I believe I know."

Mayor Van Royston subsided. The mayor was a well-meaning official. He wanted the city kept clean, but he had never approved of Wildcat's hard-boiled methods.

It was Sergeant Tom Thorsen who come in with a file from the gallery. Old Quick Trigger sorted out a dozen or more indexed photographs and spread them on the desk. Tommy Jones put a finger upon one, then on another. He showed no indecision.

"That one held a gun on me. This one, stuck up Jerry Boglund."

Deputy Bolton walked into the office, over to the desk. He was looking over Tommy's shoulder.

"Humph!" exploded Bolton,' as if he had come upon something. "Slugger Simes and Tony Swano, huh? An' we nailed a dead man with a busted truck who was a Jersey Joe thug an' in on the holdup! You must be all mixed up, Jones. The two was kicked out of Jersey Joe's mob a month ago! A stoolie reported it, an' we checked!"

Wildcat's colorless eyes flickered. "Sit down, Henry, and ease the strain on your brain," he said. "These rats were unmasked, Tommy?"

"Caps over their eyes, collars up, but the lights hit their faces," replied Tommy. "I'd know their voices, too."

"And so they had been kicked out of Jersey Joe's mob," mused Wildcat softly. "O.K., Sergeant Thorsen! Pick 'em up! I've a hunch you will have little trouble finding them. Perhaps Jersey Joe may want them found, and he isn't expecting us to make a connection with the Hillside explosion murders—"

"HA!"

Deputy Bolton reared up with a mean grin.

"I wouldn't want to suggest that you are wrong, Commissioner Gordon," added Deputy Bolton, peering down his long nose and glancing at Mayor Van Royston. "But in that hospital thing it's the damned Whisperer we're out to round up, an' I have the inside killer already locked up. I have direct evidence that a Doctor Angus Dean must be the man. An' after the explosion, he killed a nurse to keep her quiet."

"Yes, Henry?" drawled Wildcat, one hand picking up a phone. "So you have everything? That's swell. Perhaps you did not know, Henry, that Doctor Angus Dean was to have married Miss Riley, the dead nurse, next month? Always check little things, Henry."

"What? What?" exploded Mayor Van Royston.

But Wildcat was talking into the telephone.

"You will release Doctor Angus Dean at once," he was saying. "Tell him the commissioner's office regrets what seems to have been a blunder. Advise Doctor Dean to return directly to the Hillside Sanitarium and say that Commissioner Gordon will see him there soon."

It was well that Henry Bolton and Mayor Van Royston were skinny men. Otherwise apoplexy would have taken them off at this moment.

Wildcat ignored them. He turned to Sergeant Thorsen.

"You will see that Tommy Jones is locked up for safekeeping," he ordered. "Hold him as a material witness."

Tommy's square jaw dropped. He said, "But, Commissioner Gordon, that is going too far. I will be around when you—"

A red radio signal flashed on Wildcat's desk. He picked up a receiver.

"Mary Matthews is reported kidnapped!" came the report. "A car was wrecked, and Jerry Boglund was knocked out."

CHAPTER V
A MOB WORKS FAST

WILDCAT GORDON replaced the receiver. There was a new, queer light in his almost colorless eyes. Eyes that were like those of the sun-washed men of the Southwest. Killer eyes, some would say. Texas eyes.

"A mob works fast, Tommy," he said bitterly. "Mary Matthews has been taken from your car. Your friend Jerry Boglund was knocked out after a light truck wrecked your car. How about it, Tommy, changing your mind?"

Tommy Jones was white-lipped, his gray eyes seemed to suddenly retreat farther into their sockets. His hands clenched, his voice quivered.

"They got Mary?" he said. "Mary in the hands of a mob?"

Even Mayor Van Royston was silent for once. Tommy Jones might be a playboy and heir to millions, but right now he was proving he could be hit as deeply as—well, a red-blooded O'Malley. Then Tommy's teeth ground together.

"Don't lock me up yet, Wildcat Gordon!" he gritted. "I couldn't stand that! Take me with you!"

"I wouldn't lock up the devil himself at a minute like this, Tommy," said Wildcat. "Come on, Sergeant Thorsen. Let's roll!"

Tommy's expensive sports car was a crushed mass of metal in front. Its seats were intact, however, and it was apparent that the occupants had escaped serious injury before Mary Matthews was snatched. Jerry Boglund, a dark bruise over one eye, was walking around the car, fuming at the police holding him here.

"I tell you, I saw two men on that truck!" raged Jerry as Wildcat, Tommy and the others slid from the cars. "Let me go! I'll comb every dive on the lower West Side until I find them!"

"Easy takes it," advised Wildcat Gordon, coming up with Tommy. "Give me the dope, Boglund."

Jerry said he had not noticed the light truck until it was almost past the wrecked car. Then the driver, he stated, had twisted over, and the two vehicles had tangled.

Police in a radio car had heard a crash. They had heard the screams of a woman. Jerry Boglund said Theda Ross had screamed. She was sobbing hysterically beside him.

"After the truck hit, I was still O.K.," said Jerry. "But one of the two men knocked me down as I was trying to get out of the jam. That was after the car hit a post."

Tommy's car rested with its smashed hood locked around a lamppost.

Wildcat Gordon walked quickly around the wreck. He saw where a truck's tires had skidded into a half turn when the vehicles had hit. Jerry Boglund had spread his hands before the tight-lipped Tommy Jones.

"I told you, Tommy, what would happen—"

Wildcat looked into the wrecked car. Boglund had not seen enough, he had said, to know if Mary Matthews had been hurt or struck down before she was taken away. Mary had been missing when the police squad men had discovered Jerry in the street and unconscious.

Wildcat saw that the car's windshield glass had been shatterproof, but that of the light truck had not. Sometimes broken glass afforded direct leads to wanted vehicles. One of the truck lights had been smashed. Wildcat picked up pieces, fitted them together.

He walked back to the car and noted that some of the truck's windshield glass had showered into it when they hit. He picked up two spear-pointed slivers of glass that had fallen inside. As he examined them he whistled softly to himself.

He came back to Boglund and Tommy Jones.

"There is nothing to show that Mary Matthews was hurt, Tommy," he said reassuringly. "But you're lucky, Boglund, that your throat wasn't cut."

"I guess I managed to dodge the glass pretty well," said Boglund.

"They've got Mary," said Tommy; then he cursed bitterly. "But they won't dare to harm her! Maybe this is something else, a ransom kidnapping! She was my uncle's ward, and he'd give all his fortune to prevent her from being hurt!"

Tommy's own words gave him a new idea.

"Say! This mob wouldn't attempt to get Uncle Morton because of this—"

"I was afraid of this, Tommy," groaned Jerry Boglund. "Maybe it isn't too late to get Mary back if you let it be given out you've changed your mind. Tommy, it may be Mary's life against your idea of honest ethics."

Wildcat's eyes were as cold as steel.

"I have sent a picked squad to guard your uncle's residence, Tommy," he stated. "We will be in plenty of time to prevent anything happening—"

The screeching siren of a police car being driven at high speed racketed into the block. A captain snapped from it, hitting on his toes and running.

"Morton Longus has been shot!" he rapped out to Wildcat Gordon.

MORTON LONGUS, the eccentric millionaire, always slept with a revolver under his pillow. He was a lean, hard man of the older school of business. There never was anything of great value, except himself, in his big, rambling residence. It was a brownstone front of half a century before. Its neighboring houses had been transformed into tenements, shops and dives.

But Morton Longus stubbornly clung to the brownstone that had been one of the finest mansions of its day. He had retired early—as was his habit—so had heard none of the radio report of the night's mob murders and the fact that his nephew, Tommy, was in the hands of the police.

A gray-haired butler, however, had been listening in on the radio in the kitchen, The butler had become grim-lipped. He had been with Longus many years. So he went into the pantry, took down and inspected a pump shotgun he kept there.

The butler was coming from the pantry when he heard unexpected feet pounding along the wide hallway between him and the dining room. Then from upstairs came the explosions of a revolver. This was followed by a single shot with a more spiteful crack.

The butler ran heavily toward the staircase. A gun snapped at him from the darkness at the rear of the hallway. He saw moving shadows there and he whanged away at them, pumping the shotgun. A man yelled with pain, and the rear door opened and shut.

A cold draft blew into the butler's face as he reached the millionaire's bedroom. The butler's feet slipped in a wet place in the hall, and he saw it was blood. A back window was open onto the roof of a porch. The butler ran back there and saw a man climbing over the fence into an alley. Then a car roared and started away.

The butler whammed away again, but did not believe he hit the car. When he got back to the bedroom of Morton Longus, the millionaire was lying on the floor. His lean old face was white and drawn, and his eyes were closed. The butler believed him to be dead.

There was a ghastly, slow flowing of blood where a bullet had torn into the millionaire's body directly over his heart. The butler had the presence of mind to make an instant call for a doctor, then he was calling the police when a squad car drew up before the house.

THE police captain described to Wildcat what he had found.

"It was only a flesh wound across the old man's breast, and the doctor said it need not be serious, unless the shock might be too much," said the police captain. Then he added: "Longus came to his senses, and the doctor wanted to remove him to a downtown hospital. But he was stubborn. Said he wouldn't go anywhere but out to the Hillside Sanitarium."

Wildcat's eyes did not change expresssion.

"The Hillside?" he said.

"Yeah. The doctor told me that Doctor Stanwyck out there once saved the old man's life during a bad heart attack, and that he is the only person he will trust."

Tommy Jones added, unexpectedly, "That's right. He trusts Doctor Stanwyck. In fact, Mr. Gordon, if Mary Matthews and I were out of the way, the Hillside Sanitarium would get all his fortune, according to his will. He—"

"Never mind it, Tommy," said Wildcat, his face inscrutable. "You're sticking to your story?"

"I'll stick until hell freezes over!" gritted Tommy. "But I've got to be free to find Mary! I should go to my uncle at once! You'll have to let me go!"

"There's still time to back out, Tommy," said Wildcat. "In an hour the papers could be on the street setting forth that you failed to identify anyone in the jewelry holdup."

"I'll be damned if I'm that yellow!"

Wildcat touched old Quick Trigger's arm and drew him to one side. The old man groaned and shook his head.

"It all sounds like one of them crazy damn fiction yarns," said the older man. "Everythin' we touch runs right back to Doctor Stanwyck's hospital. Of course, it's only an idea, but you would think this whole business linked up with that explosion—"

"And I'm not so damn sure it doesn't," said Wildcat. "This mob is working fast. Jersey Joe is already two jumps ahead of the police. Jersey Joe will have his usual alibi, you can bet. Tommy Jones would be next, so we'll go them one better: Tommy is about to be abducted by a mob."

"Great catfish! I don't want you to do it, Wildcat!"

Wildcat walked back to Tommy Jones. Both Boglund and Theda Ross were pleading with him to drop the whole business of the holdup. Boglund requested that a police car take Theda Ross to her hotel.

"Tommy is going back with me now for safe-keeping," stated Wildcat. "Sorry, Tommy, but you wouldn't get anywhere trying to chase a mob, and probably you could not see your uncle tonight."

"I'll stick to my story!" flared Tommy. "But from here on I'm doing it in my own way! I can't go with you—"

"Hold Tommy as a material witness, Sergeant Thorsen!" snapped Wildcat. "Handcuff him to the wheel of my coupé."

Wildcat ignored Jerry Boglund's sudden oaths. Boglund raged at the police, their methods—and at Wildcat Gordon. Tommy Jones moved swiftly. He ran to the middle of the street before Sergeant Thorsen reached him. The wooden-faced sergeant swung a hard fist with impersonal thoroughness. The sergeant liked this Tommy Jones for his showing of guts.

JERRY BOGLUND raged as Tommy was placed in the coupé and his hands locked around the steering gear.

"Damn them, I'd go with you, Tommy!" said Boglund. "But I'm changing into rough clothes and I'm combing every dive. Maybe I can run onto the two thugs who took Mary. Wish me luck, Tommy. Commissioner Gordon, you will hear from Tommy's attorney about this as soon as I can reach him!"

With Tommy between them, Wildcat and Quick Trigger rode in the coupé as it headed for the water-front district. The playboy heir had recovered his temper.

"You can take off the bracelets, Wildcat Gordon," he said quietly. "I made a damn fool of myself, but if there was anyone like Mary in your life you would know what it means."

Wildcat grinned, patted his shoulder, and Quick Trigger removed the handcuffs.

A few minutes later, Tommy Jones was in the kitchen of a penthouse set upon the roof of a water-front loft building. Old Quick Trigger owned the building. Wildcat had resided there with him for many years.

Tommy looked at Wildcat Gordon, and back to a tiny, doll-like girl with astonishing blue eyes and massed black curls. She had a rounded chin, but at this moment it looked like it might go square at any minute.

The girl had set hot coffee on the table with an angry thump.

"Keeping me up to all hours!" she flared. "I wish, Wildcat, they would kick you out of your job!"

Tommy mustered a tight little grin. He had sensed what even Wildcat did not seem to know: This blue-eyed doll was the "Mary Matthews" in Wildcat's life. Perhaps Tommy felt a little better, or a little worse.

CHAPTER VI
THEY GET TOMMY JONES

THE doll-like girl was "Tiny" Traeger. She was the granddaughter of old Quick Trigger. It was no secret to her grandfather that she was wildly in love with Wildcat Gordon. Only Wildcat seemed oblivious to this. He had always regarded Tiny as a child.

Wildcat could not seem to understand that Tiny had grown to womanhood during the few years he had served his hitch in the Army.

But when they were drinking their coffee, Tiny's mood changed and she ceased raging at Wildcat for coming home late. She touched his arm and a look of caution flashed from her blue eyes.

Wildcat arose and followed her into another room.

"The board showed two cars stopping in our block just before you drove up," said Tiny. "Two men got out and came to the loft building, but neither came up. They drove away just before you came into the street."

Wildcat glanced at the paneled board with a glass square. Tubes and a series of mirrors ran from the penthouse to the edge of the roof. The board was almost exactly an example of a modern periscope, except that it was inverted.

Wildcat had placed the board there to inform those in the penthouse of all movement in the blocks near the penthouse, which set on a building fronting West River on one side.

"Couldn't be better," stated Wildcat. "The finger is on Tommy Jones. His sweetheart has been snatched."

"I know all about that, and it's too bad you can't be as human as he is about Mary Matthews," said Tiny.

"I haven't time to play," grinned Wildcat. "I've got a case in court in an hour, or as soon as I get Judge Kyley. Send Quick Trigger in here as you go out, and don't try flirting with Tommy Jones, Tiny."

Tiny tossed rebellious curls as she went out of the room. Wildcat was at the telephone. He was calling Judge Patrick Kyley.

Judge Kyley conducted a court that was more of justice than the letter of the law. The judge was a short, rubicund bundle of dynamite when it came to dealing with crooks and killers. He had been known to adjourn his court and leave the bench to throw a few needed punches at defiant thugs and their shyster lawyers.

Judge Kyley was ready to go the limit for Wildcat Gordon. This friendship often got the judge into hot water. Those who followed Wildcat usually found the going tough.

"We have picked up one Slugger Simes and one Tony Swano, triggermen for Jersey Joe Vanello," said Wildcat into the phone. "It is important that your court be called within the hour to give them a preliminary hearing so they can be put away from Vanello's mouthpiece, Attorney Jackson."

Word had come from Sergeant Thorsen that "Slugger" Simes and Tony Swano had almost walked into his hands. Wildcat, for reasons of his own, had expected that.

"I will be in court in one hour," promised Judge Kyley sleepily. "And the way I feel, Attorney Jackson had better show me proper respect."

WILDCAT replaced the phone. He grinned a little. He judged it likely that an hour from now Attorney Jackson might have good grounds to clash with Judge Kyley.

Old Quick Trigger entered. He was rubbing a hand over his bald head. "Wildcat, I wouldn't go through with it," he said. "You're playin' with dynamite when you begin usin' millionaires from Mayor Van Royston's own crowd to bait a mob."

"I've told you what to do, Quick Trigger," said Wildcat without arguing. "You have your chance to do some real stuff. Only I wouldn't try anymore dental plates. One's enough in this town."

Wildcat referred to the odd dental plate that could convert him into the dreaded Whisperer.

"And if I'd never made that one," groaned Quick Trigger, "we might have a breathin' spell once in a while!"

"And the rats would be overrunning the town," commented Wildcat. "You get your stuff ready, Quick Trigger."

"Damn if I like it, Wildcat!" grunted Quick Trigger.

But he went into his own private workshop. Here he had fussed with a few pet hobbies that had made life worthwhile since his enforced retirement as deputy commissioner.

Wildcat picked up the phone with a wry grin and called headquarters. He was set for what would be coming over the wire. His surmise had hit the mark. Mayor Van Royston had been waiting to contact Wildcat.

"You've played the devil proper this time, Gordon!" fumed his honor. "Morton Longus shot! Then they take him to the Hillside Sanitarium! You permitted Doctor Dean to go free and return there! The police place a millionaire who has been attacked by a mob in a hospital which tonight has already seen horrible murder! Deputy Bolton says you have let the chief killer go back there!"

"I have provided protection for Morton Longus," stated Wildcat. He was to learn later that he was mistaken. He added: "Put Sergeant Thorsen on the wire."

A minute later Sergeant Thorsen was instructed to bring a picked squad of Wildcat's own dependables to guard Quick Trigger's penthouse. Wildcat said he especially wanted young Detective O'Grady. "Badge" O'Grady he was called. There was a bullet scar under the place he now wore his badge.

"Right, chief," said Sergeant Thorsen without emotion. "Within ten minutes we'll be on the job."

If Wildcat had called for a picked detail on the moon, Sergeant Thorsen would have calmly agreed to have the men there in ten minutes.

Wildcat went into the kitchen, where Tommy Jones was perhaps trying to forget his anxiety over Mary Matthews by chatting with Tiny Traeger. Wildcat could see the playboy heir had made an instant hit with Tiny. She had powdered her nose, and her mouth showed an arching Cupid's bow that only a lipstick could produce.

"It's after bedtime for children," grinned Wildcat at the girl.

A hot retort to that one was flaring to Tiny's tongue. But Wildcat's colorless eyes conveyed a message much deeper than his words. When Wildcat used a look of that kind he meant business. Not even the daredevil Tiny could refuse to obey.

This did not prevent her from keeping a door open a narrow slit into the kitchen. What happened there in the next two minutes caused Tiny to push the door shut and to throw herself sobbing upon the bed. She could not understand why Wildcat should have found it necessary to employ rough methods with the good-looking, likable Tommy Jones.

When Wildcat left the kitchen, Tommy Jones accompanied him. But the playboy heir was limp in Wildcat's arms. Whatever Wildcat had planned, there would be no conscious protest from Tommy. Wildcat carried him into Quick Trigger's room and emerged as the elevator buzzer sounded.

SIX of the younger detectives, commanded by Sergeant Thorsen, came into the penthouse. They were of the dependables who had learned to follow Wildcat Gordon through the most devious and dangerous of action to outwit mob killers. Wildcat snapped out several orders.

Four men were planted in the penthouse entrances on the ground floor of the tall loft building. Sergeant Thorsen and three dicks stayed in the penthouse. One of these men was Badge O'Grady. He was tall, blond and level-eyed. He accepted any order without so much as batting a lash.

Wildcat was all set, prepared to enter upon a daring, a desperate experiment. The elevator buzzer sounded insistently. The lift came up and Mayor Van Royston himself stepped out, with long-nosed Deputy Bolton by him.

Mayor Van Royston was waving a newspaper. The headlines crowded the front page. The night thus far had been a series of sensations. Wildcat had an idea that before the night was over the editors would need two front pages.

"Look at this!" moaned Mayor Van Royston. "Already the newspapers are saying Wildcat Gordon is making a scapegoat of a playboy heir because of his well-known prejudice against the society crowd. They say the police have failed."

The mayor's kid-gloved hand slapped the headlines:

WILDCAT EXPOSES PLAYBOY TO MOB TO COVER FAILURE OF HIS POLICE!

"Now what are you going to do about that, Gordon?" demanded the mayor. "I'll tell you! You are placing Tommy Jones in Deputy Bolton's hands, and he will have a chance to save himself and Mary Matthews from being victims of a mob that has your department bluffed!"

Odorous smoke puffed from Wildcat's stubby pipe. His fingers flicked a petal of a carnation in his buttonhole.

"It happens," he stated quietly, "that Tommy Jones is prepared to accompany me to Judge Kyley's court, at once, to identify Slugger Simes and Tony Swano—"

"What? What?" gulped Mayor Van Royston. "You can't do it! The newspapers, the committee will have our heads for this! I will not permit Tommy Jones to make a fool of himself where the police have fallen down! I will—"

"Never mind me, Mayor Van Royston," muttered the blond young man who suddenly appeared in the door. "Thanks, but I'm ready to go with Commissioner Gordon."

Mayor Van Royston protested and started toward Tommy.

"Take him into custody, Deputy Bolton!" squawked the mayor. "I've had enough—"

Deputy Bolton appeared to have been waiting for that. He made one long stride toward the blond young man. Wildcat's right hand shot out, gripped Deputy Bolton's shoulder and produced an agonized oath.

"Hands off, Henry! One more step and I'll flatten your long beak! All right, Tommy! Let's get going!"

"Take the squad and follow Gordon's car!" raged Mayor Van Royston.

"I'm big enough to look out for Tommy!" snapped Wildcat. "I know my way around this town, and this isn't any parade! Henry, you can return at once to headquarters, or you can hand me your badge!"

"I'm ready, Wildcat Gordon, let's go," muttered the blond young man.

Perhaps Deputy Bolton would have defied Wildcat's order. But when the deputy and the mayor reached the squad car in which they had arrived, not one of the coppers who had accompanied them to the penthouse was in sight. Wildcat had taken care of that.

And when Deputy Bolton stepped on the accelerator, there was a brief cough and the engine died. Slamming out to investigate, Deputy Bolton discovered a wide, damp spot on the concrete. A jagged hole had been rammed through the bottom of the gas tank. Four detectives commanded by Sergeant Thorsen looked on from a distance with enigmatical smiles.

WILDCAT GORDON'S coupé shot along a riverfront street. Wildcat knew every crook and turn in the twisting ways of the lower side of the big town. He drove through the darkest and the most deserted streets.

The elbow of the blond young man prodded his ribs. A hand gestured over his shoulder.

"Sure!" grated Wildcat. "We have headlights on our tail! I would have been disappointed if they had not showed up! And you can bet that Deputy Bolton or no other coppers are in that car! Got the nerve to go through?"

"It'll be a pleasure!" grated the young man's suddenly hard voice. "The rats have Mary Matthews, haven't they?"

The lights of the trailing car were less than a block behind when Wildcat whirled the coupé abruptly and shot into an alleyway. Three blocks ahead this alley opened into a short street, and the street itself ended in Press Square.

This was a shortcut across town to Judge Kyley's court building. It was a big square, in which summer night crowds congregated in the small and grassy park flanked by an iron-picketed fence. Agitators of many ideas held forth here, usually under police supervision.

But tonight there were no extra coppers in Press Square. Some were at the Hillside Sanitarium. Others were on details directed by Deputy Bolton, hunting the elusive Whisperer. Only two patrolmen idled near the park.

Tonight the crowds seethed with excitement over the mob murders and the kidnapping of Mary Matthews. Extras piled on extras as fast as the newspapers could get them out. They carried many new and misinformed headlines in every edition.

"Get yourself set!" gritted Wildcat as the coupé emerged from the alley and into the short street, with the lighted Press Square just ahead.

"The car went around the block! Here's where it happens!"

Wildcat's hands were steady on the wheel as the coupé slowed a bit in the dark, short street. But from behind came the roaring speed-up of a fast motor. Wildcat waited until the oncoming car was almost alongside before he stepped on the gas and shot the coupé out into the street of the open square.

The other car's shape loomed up. Front fenders scraped and clashed. The coupé careened to one side, wheels hitting a high curb. Chopper snouts were thrust out. One of these let go with its crackling death, but the slugs tore across the top of the coupé.

This burst alone was enough to send the nearest persons scurrying for cover. The panic rush crowded back the two coppers near the park. Wildcat's coupé reared and mounted the sidewalk. A pistol jumped into Wildcat's hand and he pounded bullets wildly into the mob car.

"Look out! The iron rail!"

The young man beside Wildcat grasped the steering wheel and twisted. But his warning and his action came too late. The little car lifted its hood, jammed hard into the iron fence and slewed over on one side.

Wildcat's crazily aimed pistol was gripped in his hand as he was thrown to the pavement. The commissioner went to his back, and it seemed that his rusty head had taken the impact from the cement. His eyes closed and he went limp.

Three men sprang from the car that had crowded the coupé. They let go over the heads of the crowd with crackling bursts that cleared plenty of space around them.

One patrolman had battered his way through the fleeing crowd. His revolver jumped ineffectively.

A mobster lowered his chopper with a vicious snarl. The patrolman had a break of luck. One of his legs was broken and he fell down.

The blond young man who had been with Wildcat was white-faced, and he seemed acting in panicky fear. He was attempting to climb the iron fence when ruthless hands jerked him back. The young man had a pistol in his hand, and the mobster twisted his wrist and took it away from him.

"The rod don't go with the glad rags of a high-hat egg!" jeered the gunman in a low voice.

He was referring to the open-faced dinner clothes, the silk topper of Tommy Jones. It was apparent that Tommy had not been permitted time to change since the holdup of Countess Sergund. The mobster's knuckles cut across the young man's chin with spine-jolting force.

"Hey! Hey, can the rough stuff!" snapped one of the other men. "He's to be kept sweet and pretty—until Jersey Joe gets him on the house boat! Put him away, an' take it easy!"

Nevertheless, a padded sapper delivered a knockout anesthetic. Tape was slapped over the prisoner's lips and he was bundled into the closed car now swinging away from the coupé. The mob car's tires screamed as the driver swung it at gathering speed around Press Square.

NEVER had there been a more public abduction. The mob sedan actually brushed the fringe of the crowd. Hundreds witnessed the kidnapping, told mixed stories about it afterward. Police whistles started shrilling on the outskirts of the crowd. Clubs were used as coppers battered their way into the mass.

But by this time the mob car had vanished as swiftly as a rat might have dodged into a maze of sewers. The angled dark streets of the waterfront had outlets in fifty different directions. Before police squad cars could arrive, there would be no trailing the kidnap sedan.

The first coppers to arrive found Wildcat Gordon lying on the pavement. A cut over one eye was

oozing blood and the flesh about it was swelling. None could ever guess that the tough Wildcat had performed the simple operation of cracking the barrel of his pistol across his own eyebrow. Wildcat never flinched from physical punishment if it had a purpose.

And his single purpose at this moment was astounding. Wildcat Gordon was discrediting himself in the eyes of the city, of his own men, especially when Mayor Van Royston would give out the boast he had uttered. That he was big enough to deliver Tommy Jones to Judge Kyley's court.

"What—what happened?" muttered Wildcat, sitting up dazedly.

None were close enough to detect the darting keenness of his half-lidded eyes. Then he added thickly, "They wrecked us. They've got Tommy Jones."

Angry hisses and boos came from the crowd behind the policemen. These persisted as two squad cars sirened their way through and angry, aroused citizens heard Wildcat order one car to take up the pursuit while he himself coolly appropriated the other one.

The police themselves were amazed. One captain went so far as to question the commissioner, believing he might be addled by the blow on his head.

"You mean you want the car with them rats on their way with Tommy Jones?" queried the captain. "You don't want any men with you?"

"You heard what I said!" grated Wildcat. "I want the men out! I am still capable of handling this department my own way! I'm taking the car!"

That arrogance of the commissioner was to get into the newspapers along with Mayor Van Royston's own statement of Wildcat's earlier boast of being able to go it alone.

"But, chief, we should—" stammered the captain.

"I think maybe my skull is cracked," said Wildcat. "I'm using the car to get to the hospital."

And that climaxed the affair with the crowd that had suddenly become a mob. "Why, the yellow so-and-so!" shouted angry voices. "Wildcat Gordon is showing himself up! He's running out of a jam!"

CHAPTER VII
THE RUTHLESS WILDCAT

WILDCAT GORDON'S face was a grim, unsmiling mask as he jumped the squad car out of Press Square. Some of Deputy Bolton's adherents were among the coppers there. Mayor Van Royston would strut and fume. Deputy Bolton would be taking over Wildcat's office chair.

Wildcat wished Deputy Bolton a few splinters from that chair in a place where they would do the most good. From tongue to tongue went the word of Wildcat Gordon taking a car needed to pursue the abductors of Tommy Jones. Taking it to look out for himself.

By this time the mob car was being skillfully threaded through the streets of the waterfront. Any effort to pick it up could hardly succeed. Only the sheerest accident could produce anything like close police pursuit.

Except for taping Tommy Jones' mouth to prevent him giving an alarm when he might come out of the ether, nothing had been done to the prisoner. He was jammed on the floor back of the front seat. A mobster had run a hand over his evening clothes, but the pistol in his hand had been the only weapon found.

As the car came close enough to West River to pick up the stale odors of the waterfront, one man muttered, "I don't like this setup. Jersey Joe always gives a house boat party or something when there's a job on. I don't like this taking a guy to the house boat with the whole damn town yelling behind us."

"Let your ideas jell a while, smart mug!" growled the man beside him in the rear seat. "Jersey Joe knows his stuff! There's too much dough in this Longus outfit to let the big boss get away with all the gravy!"

"You mean Jersey Joe's puttin' the double X on Doc and—"

"Can the names!" snarled the other man. "And keep your feet planted on this punk until we're out of town!"

The high-speed car slithered along the city's waterfront, but turned toward a straight highway back from the river as it reached the city limits. The three men with the driver breathed easier. They were convinced they had made a clean, smart getaway.

THE mobsters would not have been so confident if they had known that Wildcat Gordon had been fully conscious when they had knocked out their prisoner. That Wildcat had heard the crack about taking Tommy Jones to the house boat of Jersey Joe. For Wildcat Gordon knew all about Jersey Joe's house boat nightclub up on West River.

One man's feet were planted on the prisoner lying on the sedan's floor. Their captive seemed to be out as cold as a corpse. He lay on his face, his hands crumpled under his body. But he had heard every word of the growled conversation.

From this he gathered that some boss was directing the activities of Jersey Joe Vanello and his mob. The "Doc" had been mentioned before the too-talkative mobster had been ordered to name no names. Perhaps the prisoner wondered if Wildcat Gordon might not have been too hasty in releasing the suspected Doctor Dean.

There were to be many added reasons for this

same question among others interested in the murder horror.

Not many men could read their location by the rumbling of tires on the road. But the odor of West River, then the sudden snapping of rubber over newly jointed concrete, told the prisoner their own story. He was fully aware when the mob sedan crossed the city limits and hit the old Turnpike Highway, which had been newly paved.

Then it was that some dispute arose between the two men in the back seat.

It concerned the arrest of Slugger Simes and Tony Swano.

"Their number's been up with Jersey Joe for a long time, anyway," said one of the men. "But they'll have to beat this rap, now they've been used, so they won't squawk."

At this minute the prisoner was sliding his hands under his body with a cautious, imperceptible movement. The car was rocking along at sixty or better. Only once was there the swishing wind of a passing car. It was well after midnight now. The prisoner could tell that no car had followed.

"Make the right turn into the third side road, Mike!" said one of the men in the rear seat.

The prisoner had waited as long as possible. His hands now were slid into the loose waistband of the dress trousers. Sensitive fingers had the reassuring feel of cold metal. There were flat guns there, lying packed into the hollow of each groin. Flat and deadly guns.

The prisoner's lips moved in soundless whispers.

"Could Wildcat have missed what they said about Jersey Joe's house boat? If he did, I'm playing a lone hand. Well, I've got two hands, and they're filled with a pair of death aces!"

NOW Tommy Jones, with all his guts and good intentions, could never have speculated upon the trump death guns in his hands with this cool calculation. Many of the best coppers in Wildcat's department lacked the iced nerves of this man on the sedan floor in the dinner clothes of Tommy Jones.

The prisoner was Badge O'Grady. And Badge O'Grady had the reputation of being the toughest and most ruthless of the younger dicks. The time had come to justify that reputation. Wildcat Gordon might have missed hearing that tipoff about the house boat, might fail to be on the tail of the mob car, but Badge O'Grady had no choice of action.

If the sedan ever reached Jersey Joe's house boat, it would be a matter of minutes before it would be known he was not Tommy Jones. And that spelled a finish in any mob lingo, with maybe his feet standing in concrete on the filthy bottom of the West River.

No other car on the highway. Only the hissing, snapping of tires over newly jointed concrete. Four armed killers against one man. This was no time for any kind of ethics, if the hard Badge O'Grady had any.

One of Badge O'Grady's pistols whipped from its place. He rolled over with a sighing groan, as if coming to painful consciousness. But the flat death in his hand flamed twice before the feet of the man on his back could be shifted.

At this close range, with two leering faces outlined against the rear window, Badge O'Grady could not miss. Yet it was somewhat of a feat to snap two bone-shattering slugs as he did under a chin of each of the mobsters.

The heads of the two men jerked upward as lead flattened on bone and ripped through their opened mouths and into their ratty brains. The speed of the car held them to the seat as Badge O'Grady shot to an upright position.

"Hold it, Mike!" squawked the man beside the driver, rearing from his seat with the explosive shock of the unexpected shots.

The driver's foot went to the brakes and the sedan slewed. But the man beside him did not complete his fast attempt to jerk a rod from his side pocket. One of Badge O'Grady's pistols went up and came down with the speed of light. The barrel sounded as if it had hit hollow wood. The mobster pitched into the instrument board, and his nose flattened.

"Keep moving!" gritted Badge O'Grady into the driver's right ear. "Take it slow! You and your rat buddy may live, but we're dumping these other mugs back here into the ditch where they may have expected to leave Tommy Jones!"

The driver's right hand had twitched away from the wheel. But it went back to the rim and the car slowed. That cold voice of steel giving the order was a death threat in any man's language. The driver must have almost felt the tearing burn of a slug that could come from the round snout of the gun pushed into his neck.

The sedan ran along an edge of the muddy ditch. Badge O'Grady opened a rear door with a hand and one foot. The same hand pulled the two corpses with the bloody faces to the side, and the foot rolled them out. The bodies went down the bank into the water and mud below.

Badge O'Grady straightened and looked again at the man he had hit with a gun. The man's cracked head did not look as if it would ever be worth much to him or to Jersey Joe. O'Grady appeared undecided for a few seconds.

Then the lights of a car coming fast around a curve jumped into the rear window.

AT the moment newspapers were rushing extras to press with the story of Wildcat Gordon's boast

that he could take care of Tommy Jones and the abduction of the playboy heir. Wildcat drove a police squad car alongside a sedan on the old Turnpike. Badge O'Grady showed a hard grin at the side window.

"It's tough, chief," he said. "Couldn't wait. They were taking a side road a piece up the highway to Jersey Joe's house boat. So I turned on the heat. Two of 'em back in the ditch won't ever beat another rap."

The cars stopped. Wildcat looked past the driver to the other man huddled on the front seat floor.

"Guess I hit him a little too hard, chief," stated Badge O'Grady. "It was him or me, and he couldn't take it."

"Too bad," said Wildcat. "And looking him over, Badge, I'd say he's about your size. About the size of Tommy Jones. All right, Badge. It's a sweet job up to this point."

Wildcat sent a glance up and down the highway. No lights showed.

"O.K., mug!" he rapped out to the driver of the sedan. "Turn around and take the first side road you reach!"

The two cars turned. They found a side road and were half a mile from the highway when Wildcat ordered a halt. He was out beside the mob sedan. One hard, ruthless hand slammed in and rocked the driver's head before fingers of steel twisted into his collar and dragged him into the road.

"You ain't gettin' nowhere with me bein' tough, even if you are Wildcat Gordon!" snarled the mobster. "I ain't talkin' about nothin', see?"

Wildcat took a rod from the man's pocket. Then his fist lashed out so unexpectedly the mobster sat down in the road.

"All right, Badge," said Wildcat, "do your stuff. This rat and me are going places. We're taking a little walk, but it may turn out to be a ride."

He yanked the mobster to his feet, pushing a pistol into his ribs. The man wiped blood from split lips and muttered.

"Jersey Joe'll make this personal! He'll—"

In the Army they call what Wildcat did "pistol-whipping." The gun in his hand went up and the barrel sliced down across the mobster's ear.

"Burned women in a hospital—murdered coppers—women beaten on the street—Mary Matthews kidnapped—listen, mug, I'm not even a copper out here in the country!"

Wildcat's cold rage was burning from his slitted mouth.

"I'm plain Wildcat Gordon, citizen, out here! And I can think of more things to do to you and keep you alive, and I'll do them, too! Walk just ahead of me or I'll take off your other ear!"

The mobster groaned and staggered groggily ahead. One of his ears was slit through the middle, and blood trickled along his thick neck.

The bearded farmer who opened the door of the first house where there was a dim light presented a scared face. He had brought a shotgun along in response to Wildcat's hammering gun, but the weapon trailed in shaking hands.

"I ain't got nothin' in the house, mister," the farmer quavered. "I'm a poor man—"

He was staring at the bloody face of the mobster, at the man with the slouched Army hat who was wearing a hard grin.

"You can put up old Betsy," said Wildcat pleasantly, flipping a bill of large denomination into one hand. "I am Commissioner Gordon of the city police. I only want to use your phone in private for a few minutes. No matter what you hear, maybe shooting, you stay out. If any word of this gets out, I'll see that the sheriff takes you in for abetting murder and kidnapping. Keep your mouth shut and you'll have something in the house—this hundred."

The farmer's Adam's apple threatened to jump out of place. He swallowed hard and gulped, "Yes, Mr. Commissioner! Phone's right in there!"

Wildcat pushed the mobster in front of the wall instrument.

"I ain't playin' no stoolie stuff!" snarled the man. "I ain't—"

One of the man's wrists snapped all the way up between his shoulders in the grip of Wildcat's ruthless hand.

"Refuse and I'll show you a little Army game of cracking up unimportant bones," said Wildcat purringly. "You're calling Jersey Joe on his house boat. You're telling him Tommy Jones had guns and started a fight. He killed three men and made you push them into the ditch. You tell him then you wrecked the car and it caught fire. Tommy Jones was burned to death in the wreck."

THE bones in the mobster's twisted arm cracked ominously. Elbow and the shoulder joints were yielding to the pressure. A whining scream tore from the man's throat.

"Stop it! I'll talk—sure! I'll tell him that, and—"

"And if you slip on one word, you'll know how it feels to have your own spine split by a slug," promised Wildcat without change of tone. "You and your kind are just so much poison to me."

The receiver came off, and the mobster called a number. There was tense pain in his voice, which made it all the better.

"This is Mike, Joe!" he croaked out. "I got some bad news—"

Jersey Joe's oaths cracking from the receiver proved in half a minute that it was plenty of "bad news." Wildcat could hear the mob chief's words distinctly.

Wildcat pushed the mobster in front of the telephone. The receiver came off, and the mobster called a number.

"You damn, lousy punk! This'll cost you your split! You get back to the house in West Tenth Street and lay low there! Don't unbutton your trap where the girl can hear you! We're workin' on her, and—"

"Say O.K., mug, and say it nice and sweet and low," came Wildcat's deadly whisper.

The mobster said "O.K., Joe!" The receiver went into place.

Wildcat pushed the man out past the open-mouthed farmer who had heard none of the phone conversation. The farmer managed stammering speech.

"Allus been wantin' to see this commissioner so's I'd know why they called him Wildcat," he

said. "Heck! If I could tell the neighbors—but a hundred'll buy a lot of feed."

Down the side road the lurid flame of a burning car was lighting up the sky. The mobster stared at Badge O'Grady. He was wearing the clothes that had been on the dead gangster.

CHAPTER VIII
"TOMMY JONES IS DEAD!"

"BACK to the city as fast as hell!" gritted Wildcat, pushing the prisoner into the rear seat of the police squad car. "And don't look back, or you may get sick! Tommy Jones is dead, huh?"

"As dead as a ring, a knife and the buttons of his open-faced clothes can make any man," said O'Grady grimly.

The burning car lay on its side in the ditch. The body of a mobster was being swiftly cremated. He had been put into the clothes of Tommy Jones. Badge O'Grady drove swiftly toward the highway. He disregarded Wildcat's order and looked back once.

The tough Badge did not look again. At that moment the sweating mobster was giving the number of the house in West Tenth Street, where he had been directed to go by Jersey Joe. Wildcat sat back and permitted the man to relax at last.

The police car spun into the highway and headed for the city. But there came the scream of a motor cycle siren. The fire in the side road had been seen. Another car whirled out of a side road and bore down the highway.

Badge O'Grady flicked off the headlights, twisted into another road. The car jumped and jolted, but it was missed by a car that must have been sent out by Jersey Joe.

For when the first police cars went up the road, called by country patrolmen, none of Jersey Joe's mobsters were found dead in the ditch. Wildcat's car reached the city limits on one of the old highways.

"Jersey Joe will have had the police informed that Tommy Jones is dead," stated Wildcat. "The newspapers will be out with it. I've an idea that is exactly what somebody wants very much. Badge, you'll take this mug back here to the old Seventy-ninth precinct station. I'm dropping out here."

"No, no," mumbled the tortured mobster in the rear seat. "Not the Seventy-ninth—not that!"

Not many mobsters but had heard the sinister words, "The old Seventy-ninth." This was an abandoned precinct station, built in the days when dungeons were the order of the day for criminal killers. If Wildcat Gordon could have had his way, dungeons and worse would have still been the order in all the jails.

Wildcat had seen too many victims who had been murdered or tortured by sleek racketeers, by brutal mobsters, to have any pity for the breed. Nothing would have pleased Wildcat better than to have had some of the city's political and mob vermin loaded on garbage scows and dumped in the ocean.

Wildcat employed the old Seventy-ninth at times for his own personal reasons. Once locked up in the rat-infested dungeons, mobsters knew what it was to have close communion with real rats that were cleaner than themselves.

Badge O'Grady had the mobster handcuffed to one wrist.

Wildcat said, "And, Badge, you're taking your two weeks' vacation, beginning as soon as you put this mug away. Make it a fishing trip to Canada on your bonus for tonight's good work."

There was no doubt but that the man known to Jersey Joe as "Mike" would remain out of circulation.

PERHAPS Mayor Van Royston hoped he would be able to snatch some sleep when daylight arrived. But his phone kept ringing incessantly. It was bad enough before the morning extras hit the streets. Then it became worse, for the whole city was aroused.

"Yes! That's what I intend doing! Wildcat Gordon is out!"

Over and over again, Mayor Van Royston repeated this assurance to demanding, enraged constituents.

TOMMY JONES MURDERED!
PLAYBOY BURNED ALIVE!

These were the ghastly headlines being cried throughout the city. The mayor was doing more than talking. He had passed the authority of the discredited police commissioner along to Deputy Bolton.

The charred body had been removed from the burned car out on the old Turnpike side road. Metal objects from Tommy Jones' knife to the buttons of his dinner jacket helped identify the body. The identification was more complete than that.

Old Quick Trigger had become an expert at disguises. His work was thorough, and he had had the advantage of seeing the real Tommy Jones as he had worked. Two filled teeth had been found near the burned body. Gaps showed in the mouth of the corpse where these had apparently been knocked out in a struggle before the body burned.

Quick Trigger had supplied these. Badge O'Grady had accomplished the rest when he had changed clothes with the dead mobster.

So it happened that Sergeant Thorsen was himself under nearly as much of a cloud as Wildcat Gordon. Deputy Bolton had little doubt as to how his gas tank had been emptied and he had been

prevented from trailing Wildcat when he had started for Judge Kyley's court with Tommy.

DAYLIGHT was streaking a sky of dirty gray when Wildcat Gordon drove a little car into an alleyway of the city slums. He was the somewhat disheveled commissioner when he went into the alley. But he was a little man in gray clothes, with whitish hair around his oddly jutting face when he ascended a rear stairway to the worst-appearing tenement in the neighborhood.

Tommy Jones was seated in a chair in a nearly barren room. One of his wrists was handcuffed to the iron pipe of a rusty radiator. The little gray man coming from the alley was The Whisperer. A dog whimpered a welcome as The Whisperer's key grated in the door lock. But the dog did not move from a position where his beady eyes could keep watch upon Tommy Jones.

The dog was a Scottish terrier with wicked fangs. He was a black bundle of fur with glittering eyes. He seemed to say, "Now what do we do?"

Tommy Jones let out a bitter oath as The Whisperer entered.

"Damn you, what is this? Where am I? What has happened to Wildcat Gordon?"

The Whisperer gave a low and ghostly chuckle. He spoke in a husky tone.

"Wildcat Gordon cannot help you now," he stated. "Only The Whisperer can do that."

Tommy's gray eyes widened, but they flashed with anger rather than fear. "The Whisperer? Then you are the one behind the kidnapping of Mary Matthews! Wildcat Gordon will find you and—"

"Listen to me, Tommy Jones," said The Whisperer. "You cannot leave this place. Perhaps, if I have luck, you will see Mary Matthews very soon. I may bring her to you."

"Keep your hands off her—"

"Watch him, Brian Boru!" came a weird, high whisper, filling the room. The Whisperer was gone. Tommy believed The Whisperer must have snatched him from the penthouse of Wildcat Gordon. For he had not known when or how consciousness had left him. Old Quick Trigger had brought him here.

For hours, Tommy had been crying out, seeking help. He might as well have saved his breath. The landlord of the disreputable tenement and his tenants did not interfere with the affairs of others. They especially did not pry into the cries for help that might come from the rooms occupied by the gray man known as D. Smith.

Brian Boru had taught all respect for his master. Some of the tenants had heard D. Smith's whispering voice. Whatever his business, they certainly were not making it their own. Tommy could as well have been in some isolated mountain cabin.

Only a few minutes later, The Whisperer was in another alley. Had anyone suggested that this bent, now ragged figure was that of the awesome super-crook, he would have been ridiculed. The ragged gray man made his way slowly along the alley.

A pointed stick was in his hand and a dirty gunny sack over one shoulder. The pointed stick picked up bits of rags, of paper, and these were thrust into the sack. The morning sky was still dirty light, and a misty rain started fogging in from the West River, not far away.

In this light and the rain, it was only when The Whisperer moved that he could have been detected. Otherwise his colorless garb merged his figure with grimy fences and walls.

The alley was empty. The Whisperer looked up at the back windows of a three-story tenement building. Other tenements had clotheslines, curtains, evidence of habitation. This one had stone window-panes and that air of having long been vacant.

But it was the address on West Tenth Street to which Jersey Joe had ordered the mobster, Mike. An address that had been wrung from the bloodied lips of the thug. A low, wooden fence backed its little yard along the alley.

The Whisperer held onto his sack, went over the fence with a single agile leap. He paused, bent over a pile of refuse, scraping it away with his stick.

His eyes slanted toward the back of the building. He saw that rusty iron gratings lay over openings at basement windows.

The Whisperer was swearing softly. Had the mobster, under his iron hands, tricked him at the last?

THEN every muscle stiffened. It might have been the plaintive cry of a trapped kitten that came to him. But The Whisperer knew it was a human voice—a voice of someone spent with weakness and pain. His gray figure was a part of the side fence for a few seconds, then he was lying flat on one of the iron gratings over a basement window.

The thin cry of pain had not been repeated. But now that he was close, he could see that a pale electric light burned in the basement room. Strong fingers pried loose the grating, pulled it away. There was barely room for his chunky body in the basement window hole, but he squeezed into the space.

Then a car came purring into the alley he had left. The car stopped at the tenement fence. Hoarse, profane voices came to him as men got out of the car and a rusty-hinged gate was pushed open.

Three slickly dressed, hard-faced thugs were slouching into the yard. They moved hastily, sending furtive glances over their shoulders. Jersey Joe was not one of the three. The Whisperer's hands were for the moment on his deadly, silenced guns.

Had Jersey Joe been there, the issue might have been brought to a quick showdown.

Jersey Joe had always avoided showdowns in his smart fashion.

The three men clumped toward the back door of the tenement. The Whisperer pressed his body down and had the iron grating pulled back into place. His thumb rubbed outside grime off a windowpane. It was the dirt on the window and the light inside that prevented a pinched-faced, ratty-eyed man inside the basement room from seeing him. That, and the merciless business in which the man was engaged.

A girl's voice cried out in agony. Mary Matthews was sitting in a chair with her body and legs bound to it. The pinch-faced rat was holding one of her hands, slowly bending a finger backward. The Whisperer could almost hear the knuckle cracking. The mobster's voice came through the window.

"You'll talk to that punk, Tommy Jones, when I get him on the phone," he was saying to the girl. "He's being held at police headquarters. You tell him if he don't lay off Slugger Simes and Tony Swano, we'll be sending him that cute finger with that nice big rock on it."

The Whisperer heard one of the three men swearing because the back door had swelled and stuck because of the rain. He saw there was a phone on a table near the girl. His gaze had just picked it up when the instrument gave an insistent buzz.

The torturer dropped Mary Matthews' hand and caught up the phone. He listened a few seconds.

"Ain't that a helluva note!" he squawked. "So they—"

A glance at the girl and his mouth snapped shut. Then he added: "All right, boss, I'll start puttin' on the real works. They're on their way, huh?"

He replaced the phone, and a fiendish, gloating expression came over his pinched features. His evil grin caused The Whisperer to brace his feet and set his hard shoulders against the window sash, tensing his muscles. The thug confronted the gentle Mary Matthews.

"You'll talk when you see what I'm bringing back!"

The man turned to the single door leading into the room, went out and slammed it. The Whisperer heard the back door yield to the pressure of the three men coming in. The Whisperer exerted his full strength with a mighty heave. The window cracked, broke loose from the casement frame.

THE WHISPERER bounded to his feet, and one hand smashed the single light globe before Mary Matthews could bring her eyes around. He could hear the girl exhale a breath of new fear.

A weird, chilling whisper filled the room.

"Keep quiet! You'll not be hurt, Mary Matthews! I've come to take you to Tommy!"

"Oh!" breathed the girl. "Who are you?"

But The Whisperer did not reply. He caught up the girl's light figure, chair and all. There was but the single door. He held the girl's weight in the crook of an iron left arm. The door opened into a dimly lighted hallway, which for the moment was empty. There was a back stairs leading upward into the gloom of the tenement.

Feet scuffled and voices muttered off to one side near the back door. Then another undisguised sound caused The Whisperer to freeze. Brakes had screamed on another car that had come into the alley so fast it had bumped the mobsters' sedan.

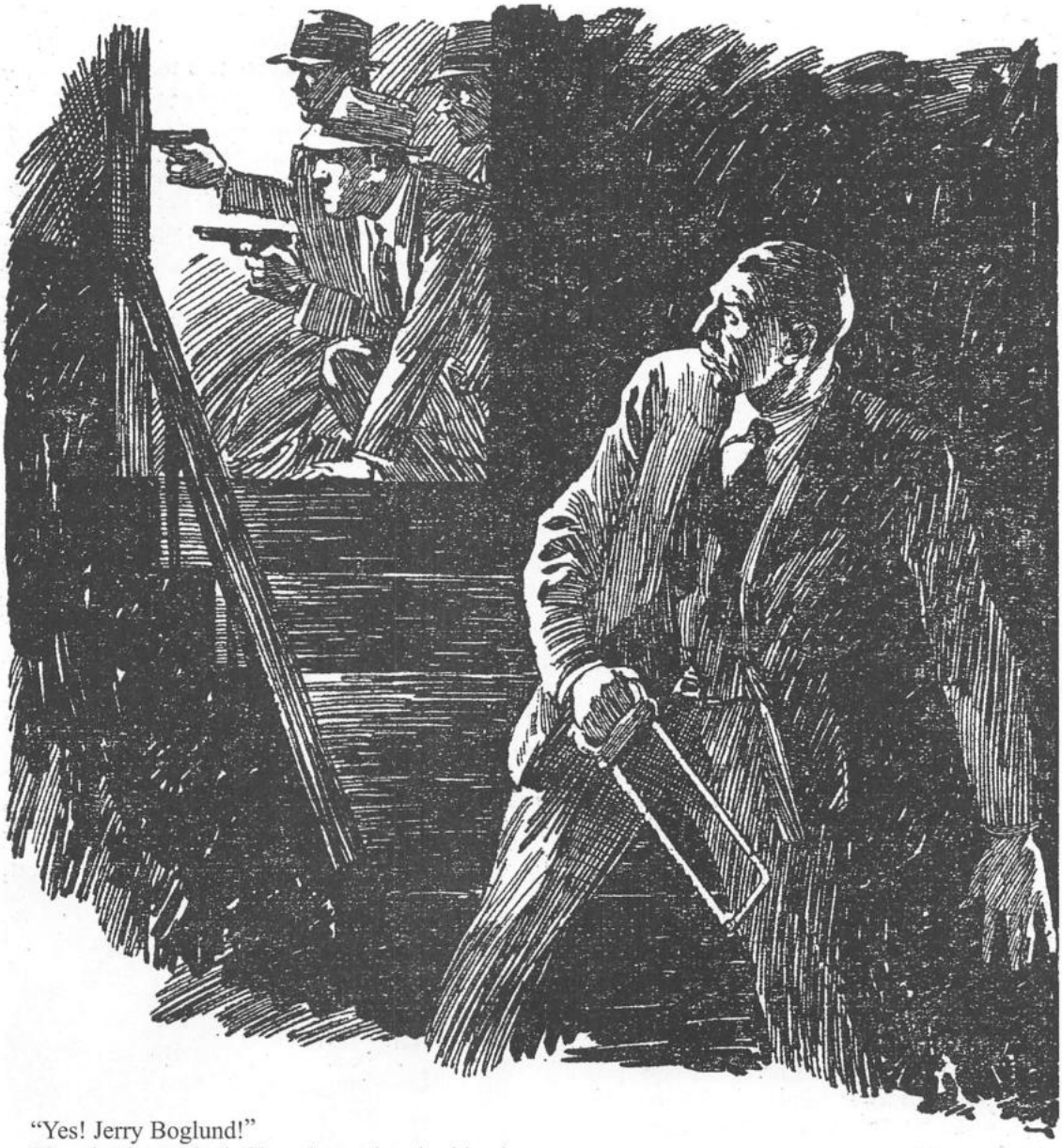
The Whisperer crouched to the wall at one side under the back stairway. He heard a bulky body strike the back door and the oaths of the three men as they turned. The Whisperer imagined for a moment that some of his police had chanced upon the trail of the kidnappers.

But it was a clear, rage-filled voice that rang out.

"Get them up, you damned killers! Up, I said, or I'll fill you—"

Sharp oaths, pulled triggers put a period to the speech. Amid the sudden staccato of guns one man rapped out, "That damned Jerry Boglund! I told you I saw him—"

JEROME BOGLUND



"Yes! Jerry Boglund!"

The pistols cracked. Slugs buzzed and whined. A door farther along the dim hallway burst open and men tumbled through it, followed by lead that thudded a pattern into the plastered wall. The three mobsters were still on their feet, crouching and shooting. It seemed evident that Jerry Boglund's courage was stronger than his aim.

Another door opened at this instant but a few feet from The Whisperer. Mary Matthews murmured, "Jerry? They've found me."

The pinch-faced mobster came from the opening door, shrank to the wall and started sidling along it, keeping well out of the range of the flying slugs. Jerry Boglund's hands must have been accustomed to pistols. Small weapons will jump, send their bullets high unless pulled down.

The pinch-faced mobster was holding a grisly instrument. He had said he would send Tommy one of the girl's fingers, her engagement finger. The thing he held was a small meat saw. In spite of the shooting, there was an unholy light glinting in his small eyes.

He slunk along the wall, watching the door through which the slugs were coming. The Whisperer heard Jerry Boglund groan as if he had been hit. It seemed he must have crouched into some shelter, or the whamming mob pistols would have rubbed him out.

The thug with the meat saw was less than a yard from The Whisperer when the latter's right hand arose and came down. One of his oddly silenced pistols was in that hand.

The thug with the meat saw was less than a yard away from The Whisperer when the latter's right hand arose and came down.

"Oh!" screamed Mary Matthews.

The meat saw clanged on the floor, and the mobster's nose flattened beside it as he fell. The Whisperer had not pulled the force of that blow. One more mobster had ceased to be of any further service to Jersey Joe.

Then a siren broke with the final wail of a police squad car grinding to a stop. "He's got the damn cops back of him!" yelled one of the three mobsters so miraculously escaping the bullets of Jerry Boglund. "Out through the sewer tunnel to the boat!"

The three pounded back along the hallway. They had not seen the torturer fall on his face. Jerry Boglund seemed to be unhurt.

"Mary! Mary! Where are you?" he called out, bursting into the hallway.

BUT The Whisperer was already ascending the back stairway, one hard hand clamped over the girl's mouth. He had much less desire to fall into the hands of his own police than to fight it out with the Jersey Joe outfit. His gripping soles made no sound.

The Whisperer could not see if the torturer on the floor had moved, but the shouting, angry Jerry Boglund cursed and pounded two bullets into the

body of the pinch-faced man. The Whisperer edged farther up the stairs.

Coppers poured into the lower hallway, armed with machine guns. Behind the first wave of police to enter, Deputy Bolton loomed up. Close behind him came the silk-hatted figure of Mayor Van Royston. The Whisperer had one glimpse of the vivid face of Theda Ross, the fiancée of Jerry Boglund.

It looked like quite a party. One to which The Whisperer, in his present guise, with the kidnapped girl in his arms, felt that he had no invitation. He heard Jerry Boglund say, "I got one of 'em! It made me sick when I shot him! Three others got away back that way! Find Mary!"

The coppers started scattering. Doors smashed open. But when they hit the back stairway, The Whisperer had reached the third floor. He went into a dingy room, still carrying Mary Matthews bound to the chair. The door had a bolt and he shot it.

An open closet showed. Coppers were smashing and banging outside. This was a spot. As The Whisperer, he would be forced to battle his own men or fall into their hands. A nice, hard-fisted career as police commissioner seemed about due to be blighted. Coupled with the heat now on Wildcat Gordon, this would be gravy for Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Bolton.

CHAPTER IX
WHEN A WILDCAT IS MAD

THE WHISPERER had no alternative but to put Mary Matthews to sleep. He did it as gently as possible. In another five seconds a window was snapped open and he had one break. A rusty old fire escape showed outside.

"This damn door's locked! Smash it down!"

That was the wooden voice of Sergeant Tom Thorsen, and The Whisperer drew one easier breath. Then his hands worked with incredible speed, even as an axe came splintering through a door panel. The Whisperer's clothes changed on pulled zippers. Gray spats rolled up from yellow shoes. A red necktie was whipped into place and a somewhat crumpled carnation from his pocket went into his coat lapel.

A round hat folded and a new Army hat whipped out and was cocked over one colorless eye. Gun in hand, as the axe crashed through again, the transformed Whisperer smashed out part of the opened window with the butt of his gun.

Jaunty Wildcat Gordon, revolver in hand, colorless eyes slanted, was standing by the opened door of the dark closet in which he had placed Mary Matthews when the outside door came open. The tough commissioner turned to the coppers pouring in, leaving the closet door partly open behind him.

Incredulous gasps caused a hard smile to flicker across Wildcat's square jaw. Sergeant Thorsen halted, looking at his chief without visible emotion.

"Take it easy, boys," said Wildcat calmly. "I had a tipoff and came over here. What was the shooting downstairs? Did you get any of them? I was just breaking through the window when—"

Jerry Boglund came ahead of Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Bolton into the room. Wildcat carelessly kicked the closet door. Jerry stared at Wildcat with dazed disbelief.

"You found the place and was here ahead of me, Mr. Gordon? Where's Mary?"

"Haven't you found her?" said Wildcat. "I climbed the fire escape and just got in when I heard shooting."

"I trailed the two men I saw on the kidnap truck," stated Jerry. "They were drunk and they gave an address. I called the police, then I followed those two and another man."

Mayor Van Royston walked over, confronting Wildcat when other coppers came up from below.

"We've gone through the whole damn house," reported one man. "There were some woman's bobby pins down in one of the basement rooms, but Mary Matthews isn't in the house."

Jerry Boglund's roundish face was suddenly filled with anger.

"Damn all of you!" he shouted. "You especially, Wildcat Gordon! Why did you use your usual sneaking methods when you had a tipoff? Why didn't you call your police and surround the house? You yellow-livered rat! It was you sent Tommy to his death, and you're—"

Wildcat's flaring anger apparently got the better of good judgment. His right fist came up, lashed out with blinding speed. Jerry Boglund's chin took it, and his jaw seemed to crack as he went down on his back. Wildcat stood, feet braced, in front of the partly opened closet door.

He was fearful that any minute Mary Matthews would return to consciousness, and he had committed himself as having already looked into the dark closet. But there was no sound from the girl.

JERRY BOGLUND snapped to his feet, lowered his head and rushed Wildcat with a bull-like roar. One fist cut a red furrow along Wildcat's jaw. His head rocked, but he countered with a straight left that sent Jerry to his hands and knees.

Then Wildcat's fingers fastened on Jerry's neck at the back, and in spite of the young clubman's strength, he was held helpless in a viselike grip.

"Now cool off, you crazy hothead!" grated Wildcat. "Anyone else here got any ideas he wants to get off his chest?"

Mayor Van Royston gulped, but the mayor was sure he had the disliked commissioner on the run.

"You're through, Gordon!" wheezed the mayor. "Trying to cover up your own cowardice and bluster by beating the only man who has shown nerve and sense! Boglund is a member of my club! I'm suspending you for neglect of duty and am holding you responsible for the death of Tommy Jones! You released Doctor Dean, and we have learned he was seen outside the home of Morton Longus just before he was shot! You're suspended, effective at once, and you'll—"

Wildcat heard a slight scraping movement in the closet behind him. He released Jerry Boglund and pushed him away quickly.

"Only the party committee can suspend the commissioner!" rapped out the hard-fisted Wildcat. "I'm still running this police department! You haven't mentioned that Doctor Angus Dean is also a member of your North Shore Club, honored because of his profession and surgical skill! No, you wouldn't! He isn't one of your silk-stocking crowd, like Jerry Boglund!"

The noise in the closet was covered for the moment. What might happen if Mary Matthews should be discovered, Wildcat could only conjecture. There could be one spot out of which he could not bluff his way.

"I'm still commissioner!" added Wildcat. "Deputy Bolton, you will take my orders! I want Jersey Joe Vanello brought in and placed incommunicado until I can work on him personally! The charge is blackmail, kidnapping, and murder!"

Deputy Bolton's round mouth held a defiant, smiling sneer.

"I think I'll be taking Mayor Van Royston's orders from now on," he said with assurance.

That was unfortunate for Deputy Bolton. Nothing covers up sound like a punching fist. Wildcat was shorter by a head than the deputy. His toes left the floor with the haymaker he swung from the level of his knees. Deputy Bolton collapsed.

"Sergeant Thorsen, you will take over as deputy commissioner temporarily!" yelled Wildcat, and his flaming anger caused even Mayor Van Royston to shrink away. "Mayor Van Royston, I advise you to take Boglund's temper to a cooler somewhere! Boglund, any further effort on your part to interfere with the police and I'll put you away! Now get out of here, all of you! Sergeant Thorsen, I want only four men! We'll take this place apart!"

Wildcat became aware of one thing as he literally drove Mayor Van Royston and others from the room: It was the sparkle of anger in the eyes of Theda Ross, who had stood white-faced, not even crying out when Jerry Boglund had been knocked down. It might be tough, but Wildcat Gordon was aware he had made an implacable enemy in this girlfriend of Mary Matthews.

Sergeant Thorsen was picking four coppers. Wildcat had a long break. The majority of the raiding squad were those loyal to him. Too many times they had seen Mayor Van Royston fail to make a suspension stick.

"In half an hour," promised Mayor Van Royston, "I'll have the party committee confirm my order! The newspapers, the public will not stomach you any longer, Gordon! You have held your job over my head, but I'll end that!"

Jerry Boglund seemed to have been a little dazed by Wildcat's treatment. As he went out with the others, he was muttering, "Wildcat Gordon has written the finish to Mary Matthews. They got her away, and she will be killed."

BUT Wildcat Gordon already was directing Sergeant Thorsen and four detectives to start sounding the basement walls for a tunnel through which he was sure three mobsters had made their getaway. He breathed freely only when the door was closed on the room in which Mary Matthews was still bound to the chair in the dark closet.

Wildcat himself whipped away from the others. One thing Mayor Van Royston had said was sticking in his mind: Doctor Dean had been seen near the Morton Longus home just before he was shot, and that would have been just after he had been released from jail. It was possible that even Wildcat could make a mistake. In fact, he made many of them.

Wildcat was at the phone now where Mary Matthews had been threatened by the mob torturer. He spoke rapidly.

"Tiny, I've got a job for you," he said. "Nurses probably are deserting the Hillside Sanitarium. Get out your trained nurse's diploma, powder your nose and apply for a place directly to Doctor Stanwyck. If you were a little prettier, you might make a hit with him. He may take you on anyway in a pinch, and—"

"Humph!" flared Tiny over the wire. "I'll do nothing of the sort! If I was prettier? Why, you ill-mannered cop, I'll—"

"You will keep an eye on all visitors that enter the Morton Longus ward," went on Wildcat calmly. "Make the acquaintance of Doctor Dean especially, and do your best to please Doctor Stanwyck."

Tiny's voice over the phone was sputtering, but Wildcat grinned a little and replaced it. He knew Tiny Traeger too well. Within the hour she would be in the Hillside Sanitarium with her nose powdered.

Wildcat had directed Sergeant Thorsen and four coppers into the basement of the tenement. He could hear them pounding at the walls. Wildcat went along the hallway. There was a thick plank

door that led into a storage room. The coppers were in there.

"Find anything, Sergeant Thorsen?" called out Wildcat.

"Nothing yet, chief," replied the sergeant. "Have you heard that Morton Longus is getting along all right? We have a double detail of police on the hospital, and two in his ward."

"That's O.K., sergeant!" called Wildcat's voice, but he was still standing back by the thick door in the darkness.

All at once, Wildcat swore savagely and there was a crunching blow, as if metal had contacted bone. A body seemed to thud heavily against the thickdoor. The electric light by which the coppers were working winked out. Into the Stygian darkness floated an eerie, bloodcurdling sound. It was a penetrating whisper.

"Stay where you are if you want to live! Don't move!"

Wildcat's voice cried out again, apparently in pain and there was another blow. He was juggling a dental plate into and out of his mouth.

Some weapon gave forth a slow hissing. One of the coppers yelled.

"Duck! Drop flat! It's The Whisperer!"

The silenced pistol was hammering slugs into the ceiling over the heads of the coppers. One copper cut loose with his service gun. Bullets splintered the heavy door so close to Wildcat that a bit of lead stung an ear. Then he jammed the thick door into place and dropped a bar across it on the outside.

Those police were to report, when they chopped their way out sometime later, that The Whisperer had struck and that Wildcat Gordon himself had been seized. This was to arouse the city to further excitement, in which a total lack of sympathy for the abducted commissioner was displayed by the newspapers.

But even the supposed snatching of the police head was quickly forgotten in other and more startling news. The report of another murder.

THE WHISPERER knew nothing of this for sometime. Quickly transforming his appearance, he went down the rusty fire escape, carrying Mary Matthews in his arms five minutes after locking his coppers in the basement room.

The Whisperer removed Mary Matthews from his coupé in an alley back of another tenement. Brian Boru, the Scottish terrier, whimpered as he unlocked a door. Furtive eyes peered at him, at the limp burden of the woman in his arms. Then doors were closed and locked. Many tenants of this disreputable building packed to move quickly.

None wanted to come within the probing inquiry of police heat. If this was a "snatch," they wanted none of it. There were few in that building who desired to be called upon to give an account of themselves. They had their own troubles with the law.

Brian Boru was still crouching in front of the white-faced Tommy Jones. Tommy exploded into raging speech when The Whisperer entered. A husky voice assured him that Mary Matthews was unhurt.

Then the girl herself spoke.

"I don't know why, but he saved me, Tommy," sobbed the girl. "One man was about to—Oh, I can't talk about it! But no one hurt me."

"You'll be all right here," said The Whisperer. "You will be freed when the proper time comes."

The Whisperer had released Mary from the chair, but her hands and feet were now bound. Brian Boru blinked deadly black eyes at his master.

"You will watch them, Brian Boru," said The Whisperer. "And don't let a pretty face fool you this time."

Brian Boru was a faithful dog. But there had been times in the past when a woman's voice had softened his vicious disposition.

Tommy Jones was still protesting when The Whisperer turned the key in the door and went out.

THE WHISPERER'S coupé rolled from the slum district. It was headed for the city suburbs and the hills where the Hillside Sanitarium was located.

A newsboy was crying an extra on one corner. The Whisperer heard the headline words and brought his car to a stop. He bought a paper and sat motionless for a full five minutes.

The front page was a succession of flaring headlines, with only bulletin news underneath. The editors were having proved to them that all news breaks at the same time.

But the headline at the top had fixed The Whisperer's cold eyes the longest, had brought husky oaths to his tight mouth

MORTON LONGUS DIES OF MOB WOUND.
LEAVES TWENTY MILLIONS TO HOSPITAL.

The bulletin stated that Morton Longus was dead. That with the death of Tommy Jones, the Hillside Sanitarium would receive the bulk of the multimillionaire's fortune. Some provision had been made for Mary Matthews, but it had been given out that the girl probably had been murdered.

The Whisperer swore again over the other headlines. One read:

MAYOR DEMANDS WILDCAT GORDON'S JOB!

Another headline said: JERSEY JOE ESCAPES POLICE TRAP!

Still another headline read:

WHISPERER SEIZES WILDCAT GORDON!

The Whisperer's face never was grimmer than now. He could well believe that Jersey Joe Vanello had been tipped off to the order for his arrest. And he did not fully believe that the tip had not gone out from his own department.

"Morton Longus dead," he murmured huskily. "And that makes it murder. It's working out. Working out too damned smoothly!"

Whatever he might have meant by this, The Whisperer debated but another minute before he left his car and walked to a drugstore phone booth. Crowds jostled around him. But none would have believed this unnoticeable man in the gray clothes with his homely, meek face could possibly be the notorious Whisperer.

Many persons were talking wildly.

"I tell you, it's all a frame-up!" announced one honest citizen. "Wildcat Gordon lets Tommy Jones be killed, burned to death! He runs out on his police! They say he blocked his men from finding Mary Matthews! I'll bet he is in cahoots with The Whisperer himself!"

This honest citizen would have had his hair curled had he suspected the little, gray man just brushing his elbow was The Whisperer.

Quick Trigger answered the telephone with a deep groan.

"Wildcat, for grief's sake, where are you?" said the older man. "If there is any crime you haven't got yourself accused of, I haven't heard about it! This time you've got to come clean, Wildcat.

"When you're out of office, maybe in the big house for some of the things they're pinnin' on you, I'll—"

"Did Tiny go to the hospital, Quick Trigger?" interjected Wildcat.

"Yes, yes! I was coming to that! And if she is connected up with you after Morton Longus has died, you'll never—"

"Sure!" said The Whisperer crisply, his dental plate being palmed. "Now listen, Quick Trigger! I'm reporting to the hospital again as orderly for the night shift! You will do this—"

CHAPTER X
WHO IS THE KILLER?

OLD Quick Trigger's protest did not prevent The Whisperer from walking calmly into the Hillside Sanitarium at the hour for the night shift. He was fully aware that the police had wanted the little gray orderly, D. Smith, and that he was supposed to have either been taken away by a mob or seized by The Whisperer.

Perhaps he counted on someone cracking at the unexpectedness of his reappearance. But there was a hushed air over the big hospital that told of an undercurrent of excitement, of fear, of suspicion. The advent of the gray orderly was unnoticed for considerable time, for he took up his regular duties and managed to remain in secluded wards and corridors.

This, however, did not prevent him from seeing the trim, doll-like figure of Tiny Traeger. She was in the starched uniform of a nurse. By chance she had been given duty on the third floor among the best of the private wards, and it was here that Morton Longus had died.

Now Tiny knew D. Smith, but she had never known that he was The Whisperer. In fact, she had met him a number of times, but thought him to be merely a queer but close friend to Quick Trigger and Wildcat Gordon himself.

The Whisperer went his unobtrusive way, and did not attempt to make contact with Tiny at this moment.

His eyes and ears were absorbing all that went on. Nurses chattered, but more whispered in fear-filled voices. The Whisperer heard the suspicion that was being voiced.

"Doctor Stanwyck is getting rid of Doctor Dean—Doctor Dean was in attendance upon Morton Longus when he died—the hospital is to get millions—Doctor Dean wanted the Longus fortune for his crippled children—"

The Whisperer considered these whispers. Could it be possible that a great surgeon had become so fanatical, possibly so flaming with ambition that he had been ready to do murder to further his own ends?

When a doctor devoted his time to relieving crippled children, it did not seem possible. But there was another angle to that: Perhaps children were nothing but cases upon which he could display his skill, make himself known as a great surgeon.

The routine of the hospital had been completely upset. Many nurses had quit their posts following the explosion murders in the operating room. Doctor Stanwyck had been forced to make some shifts in the intern staff. The less important work of orderlies was not being too closely observed.

THE WHISPERER slipped down to the ground floor. His face concealed, he was dusting along the lower corridor. Several men came from the hospital morgue. Doctor Barton, one of the police medical examiners, was with them. Doctor Barton was saying, "I am convinced the man's heart was too weak for the shock. I hear that in some way the news of his nephew's terrible death reached him."

The Whisperer swore softly. If that were true, the real murderer had not been the man who fired the mob bullet.

The murder had been committed by someone who knew what grief and shock would do to Morton Longus, with his heart ailment and his weakened condition.

"There was some bad infection in the wound, though," continued Doctor Barton to the other man. "He had quick care, and the tissues should not have been affected that way; but it sometimes happens."

Doctor Angus Dean came along the corridor. The Whisperer saw that his dark, blue eyes were black with intensity. The square-jawed face was white and set.

"Yes, there was infection in the wound," he said to Doctor Barton. "Perhaps the sterilization was improperly done at the first."

The Whisperer could feel tense suspicion in the silence that fell among the men with Doctor Barton. And Doctor Barton, who was an easy-going fellow, made no reply, but swung abruptly on his heel and walked away. Doctor Dean stood looking after them, and The Whisperer heard him utter a short, hard oath.

Then Doctor Dean strode to the elevator and went upstairs.

The Whisperer suddenly decided he had cleaning to do on the third floor and took the employees' stairway up.

The Whisperer moved slowly along the third-floor corridor, brushing imaginary dust from the white-tiled wall. The nurses who were not hurrying from one ward to another seemed to want to remain together. They were grouped closely around the supervisor's desk at the far end of the long space.

The elevator had beaten The Whisperer to the floor. He did not see Doctor Dean. But Doctor Stanwyck came from a ward and walked hurriedly toward his own office. This was close to the operating room where the blast had taken place.

The Whisperer was undetected, but he had a glimpse of Doctor Stanwyck's somber eyes and his long face. The chief surgeon seemed to have added new lines of worry. His long-fingered hands played nervously as he walked, and there was about him the same fear and suspicion that permeated others in the hospital.

Doctor Stanwyck's office door closed softly behind him. The Whisperer was immediately brushing dust close to the door. From within he could hear the soft crackle of paper. Doctor Stanwyck's voice murmured as if he were talking to himself.

But it was neither the paper nor the voice that suddenly stiffened The Whisperer. Two whiplike cracks might have been made by a toy gun. If The Whisperer had been a few yards away he would not have heard them. But there could be no mistaking the explosions of a silenced pistol.

DOCTOR ANGUS DEAN

The door of the office was locked. The Whisperer took a slender steel tool from his clothes. The lock yielded. No one was looking, and no one had heard the shots when The Whisperer stepped inside.

Doctor Stanwyck was lying on his face close to a big desk. His hands were stretched out and he might have been dead, but as The Whisperer crossed the soft rug, the surgeon moved slightly. At the same instant there was a slight scraping sound and The Whisperer whipped to a window that opened on a fire escape.

He had a glimpse in the darkness of a figure entering a window on the floor below. The Whisperer was halfway through the window when another door leading into Doctor Stanwyck's office creaked a little. It was being softly closed.

It drew The Whisperer's eyes, and for the first time he saw the little wisps of blue smoke drifting over the doorway. On the door was the neat sign, "Doctor Dean, Assistant Surgeon."

An ear pressed to the door, The Whisperer heard the outer portal into the corridor open. He whipped across the office and let himself out noiselessly. The broad, white-coated back of Doctor Angus Dean was already disappearing through the door leading to the operating room where the murder blast had taken place.

THE WHISPERER was a part of the white wall, a drifting shadow in gray, as he reached the operating room. This door had not been locked, and he snapped it open, stood inside and closed it behind him. The place was in darkness, and for a few seconds The Whisperer heard nothing.

Then there came the soft *clink* of metal, as if it had touched glass. The Whisperer could smell steam from a sterilizing cabinet. He crossed the room with a swift movement that made no sound. But the other man in the room must have been warned by the opening of the door.

"Damn you, Revers!" grated the voice of Doctor Angus Dean. "This time I'll make it a finished job!"

Something sharp sliced the air, and The Whisperer saved his face or his throat by dropping instinctively to the floor. He did not need to be told that Doctor Dean must have swung one of the sharp surgical scalpels.

The Whisperer came up as fast as he dropped. Doctor Dean had been thrown slightly off balance, and one of his knees collided with The Whisperer's head. It was no time for ethics.

The Whisperer let one ripping blow follow another. The first drove into Doctor Dean's lean stomach, just under his heart. The second was like a thunderbolt coming straight up from the floor and clipping the surgeon's chin as it passed.

Doctor Dean groaned, staggering back. But The Whisperer felt the slice of the keen blade cutting through a sleeve of his coat. Then his fists exploded with blasting effect about where he judged Doctor Dean's face to be.

The surgeon went down, and the breath sighed from his lungs. The Whisperer hit him again for good measure, a punch that would keep him out of circulation for some time.

He was thinking Doctor Dean had said "Revers." Could the assistant surgeon have an insane killer's hate for Doctor Stanwyck and Doctor Revers, the intern? No time for abstract theory now. He picked up the limp surgeon and carried him to one of the lockers in a side room. The steel door closed and latched.

Back in the operating room, The Whisperer groped a hand into the hot steam of the sterilizer. He snatched out an automatic pistol that was equipped with a silencer. There could be no fingerprints upon it now. Perhaps that was why Doctor Dean had chosen the steam tray as a hiding place. Moreover, no one would be likely to look among the surgical instruments for such a weapon.

The battle in the darkness had taken less than a minute. As The Whisperer emerged into the corridor, he breathed more easily. There was still no alarm. Perhaps Doctor Stanwyck was dead or mortally wounded. And he wanted a talk with Doctor Stanwyck, if he were alive and conscious.

The Whisperer entered Doctor Dean's own office. He unbolted the door into Doctor Stanwyck's office quietly, opening the door a bare crack. A sliver of light struck his eyes, and he gasped in amazement.

Doctor Stanwyck was sitting at his desk, very much as if he could not possibly have been lying on the floor, the victim of bullets. His reading light showed a grim face, black eyes that gleamed with some purpose. And Doctor Stanwyck was busily engaged writing in a book, a little book with a red leather cover.

This was incredible! The Whisperer stuck to his position. He saw then that a big safe in the office was standing open. Doctor Stanwyck arose with a smile that was like steel light in its hardness. His lips moved.

"Whatever happens, it will convict them if they get me."

Doctor Stanwyck was walking toward the big, old-fashioned safe. That little red book must have contained data that was valuable indeed to the surgeon.

The lights in the office blinked out: The Whisperer had located the switch close to Doctor Dean's door as he snapped it open. His ghostly whisper, the eerie sound that had congealed the blood of hundreds, floated through space.

"Don't close that door if you want to live!"

This Doctor Stanwyck must have had nerves of steel. He gave forth no sound of surprise or fear. The metal bolts of the safe door clicked softly.

"I am afraid it is closed," he said with low-voiced calmness. "Are you really the man called The Whisperer, or are you putting on an act?"

THE WHISPERER had never been more amazed. The surgeon was speaking as if some old friend, an invited guest, had just walked into his office.

"Stand where you are!" commanded the weird whisper. "You're so cool about it, suppose you tell me how you happen to be alive after being shot twice?"

"Let me sit down," said Doctor Stanwyck quietly. "I was shot twice. A bullet can give one quite a jolt and make one's back damned sore, even under a bulletproof shirt."

So that was it! But it did not account for the infernal coolness of the surgeon. Doctor Stanwyck added: "Suppose we have some light?"

"There will be no light, for no one has ever seen me to remember my face," said The Whisperer. "What is it you have to say before you answer some questions of my own? For example, what were you writing in that little red book?"

"I don't mind telling you that little book could put several persons in the electric chair," said Doctor Stanwyck without change of tone. "But you are the supercrook, The Whisperer, is that right?"

"You've got the nerve of the devil himself, Doctor Stanwyck," said the Whisperer.

"I need all the nerve I can muster," said the surgeon. "I agree I should not see your face. You may be surprised to know I would have sent for you if there had been anyone who could possibly have given me a lead. Your very mystery is your protection, and I will respect it, unless you should double-cross me."

The Whisperer was growing more bewildered. He stood tense in the darkness. Perhaps the cold-nerved surgeon was making a play to reach a weapon. He reached out quickly and trapped the surgeon's wrist. Doctor Stanwyck was in the act of sitting down at his desk.

"Don't trust me, eh?" and Doctor Stanwyck gave a short, hard laugh. "That is right, Whisperer, don't trust anyone. It has been my own tough luck to have been gullible from time to time. So, a little while ago, someone tried to send me west. But I had been expecting that, and was prepared."

The Whisperer was forced to admiration.

"Who was it tried to kill you, Doctor Stanwyck?"

"Any one of several persons. Perhaps one of the nurses. Or it may have been one of my doctors, an intern."

"Doctor Dean is not an intern," said The Whisperer quickly.

"I do not believe it was Doctor Dean," stated the surgeon. "But that is a little matter I will look after myself. If you will help me with another affair, I will pay you more than was ever before paid for a man's life. That's what you are, isn't it, Whisperer? A killer and a thief?"

"That is what I am," said The Whisperer.

"Well, then, I have been blackmailed by Jersey Joe Vanello," said Doctor Stanwyck. "It is a matter of which you need know nothing. Jersey Joe is now here in the hospital, in Ward 14. He is an accident case with his face wrapped in bandages. Doctor Dean is attending him, and he was reported badly cut in an auto accident.

"You want me to get Jersey Joe?" Again the strange Doctor Stanwyck handed out a surprise.

"I will take care of him myself," he said calmly. "It is another man I want put into my hands. He has become a threat to my life, over an old score you need not know about. Today a woman friend of his was admitted to the hospital. She is not suffering from the ailment she claimed; in fact, is not at all ill. I have added two and two, and the total is another murder and my funeral. I want this man put into my hands, and for that I am willing to pay one hundred thousand dollars."

NEVER in all his hectic career had The Whisperer been confronted by a more astounding proposition, or by a more amazing man. It could either prove or completely upset one or two theories he had built up. And these theories, if they became evidence, would be the most confounding break ever given to a police case.

"Arrange it for me to talk with Jersey Joe alone in his room in the darkness," said The Whisperer on the spur of the moment. "Fix that for me tonight and I will bring you the man you want. Name him."

"I will fix that with Jersey Joe," said the surgeon. "But not so fast with names. You will contact me on the direct phone number, GA7-6166, from the outside, and I will name the man. The money will be in cash, delivered to you when the man is to be put in my hands in exchange. Is that fair enough?"

At this minute The Whisperer would have had to confess he was a little dizzy. All the time he had been making sure that Doctor Stanwyck was not playing for time while he might be pressing some secret signal. The Whisperer was on edge, ready to meet any such emergency, but nothing happened.

"It is fair enough," admitted The Whisperer. "I will contact you. You will stay in your office for five minutes after I leave. I will know that if you do that you are on the level about all this. If you do not, you will have no warning of my next visit."

"Done," was Doctor Stanwyck's single word.

The Whisperer faded through the door of Doctor Dean's office. He had five minutes. Ten seconds later he was the little gray orderly in a closed telephone booth.

"Sergeant Thorsen," he said, "bring the squad for Jersey Joe."

CHAPTER XI
THEY ARREST A CORPSE

THE WHISPERER was not so sure he trusted the amazingly cool Doctor Stanwyck. The surgeon had said he would fix it for him to have a few minutes alone with Jersey Joe in Ward 14. The Whisperer had decided to arrange his own interview. The slippery Jersey Joe Vanello would not have another chance to slip from a police trap.

The Whisperer got another number in the phone booth. Old Quick Trigger's worried voice replied. There was something already understood between them.

"Be waiting for me in fifteen minutes, Quick Trigger. What's new?"

"We're not doin' so good, Wildcat," complained Quick Trigger. "I hear Deputy Bolton has got a warrant from the D.A. an' is sendin' out to arrest Doctor Dean again. They are makin' a great to-do about showin' you up for keeps this time."

"It has been done before," said The Whisperer crisply. "Be waiting as I told you."

The five minutes he had given Doctor Stanwyck to remain in his office had expired. The Whisperer replaced his odd dental plate and slanted his gaze along the corridor. He saw the intern, Doctor Revers, walking quickly toward a ward room door with the furtive air of a man who has something on his mind.

It came to The Whisperer that Doctor Revers probably had been the prowler on the fire escape outside Doctor Stanwyck's window when the shots had been fired. Doctor Revers glanced both ways, opened a door and went into a ward.

The Whisperer was convinced this would be Ward 14. He was easing himself from the phone booth, but ducked back in. Doctor Stanwyck walked from his office, looking this way and that. A hard smile flickered across the long face of the chief surgeon.

Doctor Stanwyck walked directly to the door where Doctor Revers had entered. But the intern walked out and closed the door behind him as the surgeon reached the ward. Doctor Stanwyck spoke in a curt, angry tone.

"Doctor Revers, you will report to the emergency ward on the first floor at once!" he commanded. "You seem to be taking an interest in too many of the cases up here!"

"Yes, sir," said Doctor Revers. "Sorry, Doctor Stanwyck, but I heard the accident case in Ward 14 crying out in pain. I'll go down."

The Whisperer saw Doctor Revers enter the elevator, and it dropped. He had a quick hunch that Doctor Revers might not be going to the emergency ward. The morgue where the body of Morton Longus lay was on the first floor. For his own reasons, The Whisperer had made a study of its location with relation to the outside driveways.

At this moment came the low, dying wail of police cars that had been coming up the hill from the city. The Whisperer grinned wryly. It could be either Sergeant Thorsen to arrest Jersey Joe, or it could be Deputy Bolton with his warrant for Doctor Angus Dean.

"But he will first find Doctor Dean," chuckled a ghostly whisper.

THIS time, however, the stalwart Sergeant Thorsen had beaten Deputy Bolton to the punch. He had been given special orders. This was no quiet arrival for a secret arrest. Rather, half a dozen cars made a great racket, and they surrounded all but one side of the hospital.

Sergeant Thorsen headed a double squad of detectives who seemed to create a great deal more disturbance than the occasion warranted. Hand-picked coppers clumped into the sanitarium, and some were spotted on each floor. Within two minutes, all interns, nurses and orderlies were placed under police guard "for their own safety," according to the wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen.

The Whisperer stuck to the phone booth until he saw two morgue attendants and two ambulance drivers brought upstairs by the police. No one noticed the little gray man glide along the third-floor corridor. He entered the operating room and opened a steel locker.

Doctor Dean lay over The Whisperer's shoulder as he went down a fire escape in the darkness. Three ambulances stood close to wide receiving and exit doors. The Whisperer opened the rear of one and deposited Doctor Dean's limp body. The assistant surgeon appeared to be taking a long count from the hard punches he had received.

The Whisperer scanned his surroundings. There were no police on this side. Instructions he had given Sergeant Thorsen were responsible for this and for the noisy police invasion and the rounding up of the hospital staff. A slender steel tool caused the bolt of the morgue door to slide back.

There were four sheeted bodies in the silent, white morgue. The Whisperer halted beside the second still figure. A flashlight came into one hand. It played for a moment over the marble mask of death that had been the stubborn face of Morton Longus, the millionaire.

A hissing whistle came from The Whisperer's lips. He was looking closely at the bullet wound across the corpse's breast. This had become a thick and swollen mass of flesh. But the wound's penetration could hardly have been bone deep.

The Whisperer was touching this wound carefully when he heard shuffling footsteps in the hospital corridor. He flicked out his light and crouched beside the bier. A door opened and the steps shuffled inside. The man entering also had a flashlight, and its ray danced around until it picked out the body of Morton Longus.

A sharp little whistle came from compressed lips. The Whisperer had not pulled the sheet back over the face of the corpse. The man snapped off his light, halting with tense rigidity. He was too late to prevent his beady eyes and hard line of a mouth being seen.

The metal of the Whisperer's pistol barrel clunked hollowly on bone. Doctor Revers, the intern, collapsed without a sound. Then he was swung into The Whisperer's arms and carried outside. The Whisperer opened the ambulance door. Then he emitted ghostly, whispering oaths.

Doctor Angus Dean had disappeared! Quickly, cautiously, The Whisperer placed Doctor Revers inside. He pulled a little bottle from one pocket and snapped liquid over the face of Doctor Revers. The intern would not follow Doctor Dean. The

Whisperer had made sure he would remain unconscious. When he would get Doctor Revers to the old Seventy-ninth precinct station, the beady-eyed intern would talk or life would become very unpleasant for him.

The Whisperer heard excited cries coming through open windows. They originated on the third floor. He believed at the moment these were caused by Sergeant Thorsen carrying out his remarkable order to create a disturbance.

The Whisperer whipped back into the morgue, after giving a hasty glance around outside. All was quiet. Not a leaf stirred on the shrubbery. He was not half a minute returning to the ambulance with the rigid body of Morton Longus. One hand opened the ambulance door.

The Whisperer's blood ran as cold as it ever had. Doctor Revers, the intern, was no longer inside the vehicle!

NOW hoarse shouts were coming from the third-floor windows. More police cars whirled up to the receiving doors around the corner from the morgue. The Whisperer knew with grim finality that Deputy Bolton must have arrived with his D.A. warrant for Doctor Dean.

With the corpse of Morton Longus inside, The Whisperer started the ambulance motor under cover of the excitement above and the noise of Deputy Bolton's sirens. It was impossible to linger, if he had wished, to make a search for Doctor Dean or Doctor Revers.

The ambulance rolled and coasted almost noiselessly into the curving street below the hospital. The Whisperer had but one theory: Doctor Dean had at last got Doctor Revers into his hands. The Whisperer reflected that probably Doctor Revers would never talk, in the old Seventy-ninth dungeons or elsewhere.

The unnoticed, departing ambulance left behind a furor that was rapidly spreading through the Hillside Sanitarium.

SERGEANT THORSEN had been with the men who had shoved hospital attaches aside and snapped open the door of Ward 14. It was something to get their hands on Jersey Joe Vanello, alibi-maker and beater of "raps," posing as a hospital case and hiding out. Sergeant Thorsen was wearing an expression that was the nearest he ever came to a smile. But the smile rubbed off.

Doctor Stanwyck was standing beside of the single bed in Ward 14. A nurse had been called in and was silently watching the surgeon.

"The police?" said Doctor Stanwyck quietly. "I have just discovered that this accident case, who was under the care of Doctor Dean, has no wounds under his facial bandages. I cannot understand why Doctor Dean failed to report this. The patient is not a Peter Locke, as shown on our registry. He is the mobster pictured by the newspapers as Jersey Joe Vanello."

"I know that, Doctor Stanwyck," stated Sergeant Thorsen. "We have come to remove him to headquarters."

Doctor Stanwyck's solid, black eyes mirrored hard humor.

"You have arrived too late, gentlemen of the police," he said. "Jersey Joe will be of no use to you. He has beaten his last rap, as the newspapers express it."

The surgeon pulled away the sheet. A scalpel showed a glittering handle above Jersey Joe's heart. Fresh, scarlet blood had scarcely ceased oozing. Jersey Joe was very dead.

"I have not touched the weapon," stated Doctor Stanwyck, "so there may be prints. It would seem that the killer may be in the hospital, or he may have disappeared. We have many interns, nurses and assistant physicians. It may interest you to know that only a few minutes ago an attempt was made to kill me in my office."

The ward door was open. A tall, long-nosed figure barged into it.

"And at that time I heard a ghostly whisper," added Doctor Stanwyck.

"What's that? What's that? How in hell do you happen to be here, Sergeant Thorsen? You said you heard The Whisperer? Why, damned if that ain't Jersey Joe! Who bumped him? The Whisperer did that?"

"Now he might have, at that," said Doctor Stanwyck, "if he can come and go as mysteriously as it is reported."

Three minutes later, the angered Deputy Henry Bolton learned that Doctor Angus Dean and a Doctor Revers had mysteriously vanished. On top of that he issued a suspension order for Sergeant Thorsen and every man with him. And he had Doctor Stanwyck coolly describe how he had escaped death, supposedly at the hands of the amazing Whisperer.

Whatever he may have intended his future relations with the Whisperer to be, it appeared that Doctor Stanwyck was, in his cold-nerved fashion, establishing in advance a story that might clear him of complicity in anything that would later link him with the super-crook.

THOUGH Deputy Bolton suspended Sergeant Thorsen, that wooden-faced detective was about as communicative as a razor clam half an hour later at police headquarters. Neither Deputy Bolton's threats nor Mayor Van Royston's promise to have

him disgraced and driven from the department changed his one simple explanation of the hospital raid to seize Jersey Joe.

"I had a secret tipoff," said Sergeant Thorsen. "That is all."

Mayor Van Rayston paced up and down like a caged animal. He flourished fresh newspaper headlines dramatically, and groaningly predicted the whole Reform Party would be ousted from office.

Indeed, it seemed this might be so. The city was becoming a little numb to new shocks from the headlines. The mayor pointed these out.

But the single line that was curling the hair of Mayor Van Royston and causing the telephones to ring insistently, wanting to know what, if anything, the police were doing about it, was:

MORTON LONGUS' BODY STOLEN!

It was about this time that the body of Morton Longus lay in the morgue of an undertaker in the suburbs. The mortician was a man who had long been a friend of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon. But he did not like his present favor in the least, though he was going through with it.

The mortician had read medicine, and he was a thorough man. The jaunty Wildcat Gordon stood beside old Quick Trigger and watched the examination of the corpse, especially of the wound Morton Longus had received from the mob.

Quick Trigger had met The Whisperer with a car, and the body had been swiftly transferred from the hospital ambulance, which later was one of the items discovered by the police. Now Wildcat Gordon coldly directed the undertaker.

"A quick autopsy, that's all I want."

"Morton Longus, the millionaire!" groaned the mortician. "His body stolen, and here in my place! The city burning up, with your own police believing you have been abducted by the whispering crook, and all you want is a quick autopsy and me to conceal the body!"

"That's all," stated Wildcat.

The mortician was examining the swollen flesh of the breast wound. Suddenly he employed an instrument. He seemed to forget the jeopardy in which he was being placed. A few minutes later he looked levelly into Wildcat Gordon's eyes.

"Morton Longus did not die of the original wound, a heart failure or shock," he stated. "An inner radium burn ended his life. It did not show because of the condition of the bullet wound."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Wildcat. "Keep the body until you get further instructions. Quick Trigger, you will keep an eye on Tiny in the hospital. I have urgent business."

"Good grief, Wildcat!" appealed Quick Trigger. "An' the headlines are sayin' that Jersey Joe was murdered, an' Doctor Dean has disappeared! What's comin' up next in this crazy riddle?"

Wildcat had Quick Trigger outside, pushing him into his car. He spoke in a confidential tone.

"Quick Trigger, I very much fear The Whisperer is about to become a kidnapper."

CHAPTER XII
KYLEY CALLS A CASE

OLD Quick Trigger rubbed a faltering hand over his bald pate. Little beads of sweat popped out on the shiny expanse.

"If you're not the next one laid out in the morgue, Wildcat, then I am no prophet," he groaned. "I reckon we're in too deep to back out. But suppose somethin' should happen to Tommy Jones an' Mary Matthews? What would—"

"You keep an eye out for Tiny," interrupted Wildcat. "I'm giving her certain instructions, if I can get her to a hospital telephone; and I believe I can."

In the confusion at the Hillside Sanitarium, it was not difficult to reach Tiny Traeger, who had carefully kept herself from being observed by Deputy Bolton or his coppers during the recent raid. Wildcat's voice was a crackling command.

"Whatever you do, Tiny, don't take any chances!" he said over the phone. "You will merely observe all that you can of Doctor Stanwyck's actions during the next hour or two! Now don't make any blunders!"

"Make any blunders?" sniffed Tiny in reply. "Don't worry, Wildcat; from the newspaper reports reaching us, you have a corner on them. No one could possibly find a mistake that you haven't made. I guess I can look out for myself."

A funny feeling came over Wildcat as he left the phone. It was a sort of tickling under his heart, but it was pleasant. He could not figure out just what it might be, but he did turn back to the phone to recall Tiny. Damned if he would let her take any chances!

But a newsboy's voice squawked just then, "Judge Kyley forced to call hearing of mobsters!"

Wildcat swore shortly, and promptly forgot the first sensation of softness he had ever experienced where Tiny Traeger was concerned. He went to a side street where his coupé was waiting.

IT was about this time that Sergeant Thorsen and a dozen or more of the detectives most loyal to Wildcat Gordon were leaving headquarters. For the hospital raid and refusal to give information, the crack squad had been suspended by the irate Deputy Bolton.

Deputy Bolton was sitting in Wildcat's swaying chair. A phone buzzed on the commissioner's desk. Mayor Van Royston turned an alert head. He was at the moment talking with a young man whose low-

voiced conversation was interspersed with frequent oaths.

This young man was Jerry Boglund. There were lines among the bruises planted on his face by Wildcat Gordon. His eyes were sunken with anxiety.

"I tell you, mayor, if they have killed Mary Matthews and Gordon escapes and ever comes into my hands, there will be another murder," he said, as if he meant every word of it.

Deputy Bolton had picked up the telephone. A voice spoke.

"What? What?" he exploded. "You can't do that, Judge Kyley!"

"I am calling the cases of Slugger Simes and Tony Swano for preliminary hearing at ten o'clock in the morning," repeated the voice of Judge Patrick Kyley.

And when Judge Kyley called any case unexpectedly, there was always imperative reason.

"But Tommy Jones is dead, an' we have no witnesses yet!" protested Deputy Bolton. "With Commissioner Gordon missin', there is no direct evidence we can produce. That will put my police on the spot!"

"If there is any spot *your* police have missed, I don't know what it is, Henry!" exclaimed Judge Kyley irritably. "The defendants are charged with robbery, with arms and complicity in murder! Attorney Jackson demands their hearing or their release. I have been informed there will be one direct witness : Jerome Boglund will be called, and under oath he will be asked to identify the prisoners!"

Deputy Bolton swore and stared at Jerry Boglund.

"By whose order will Jerry Boglund be called?" said Deputy Bolton. "I am the actin' head of police, an' I didn't order—"

"The D.A.'s office must have failed to hear about you," said Judge Kyley. "They will call Boglund. And as for you being head of the department, Henry—well, there have been other times. Ten o'clock in the morning, Henry."

Deputy Bolton slammed back the phone and turned a red, angry face toward Mayor Van Royston. Mayor Van Royston apparently had heard Judge Kyley's unmuffled voice. So had Jerry Boglund.

"I heard all of it, Henry," said Mayor Van Royston importantly. "Boglund, don't worry. I have some influence with the D.A. You won't be called to testify. I'll—"

"That's a slight mistake, your honor," spoke a cool, icy voice from the doorway.

THREE faces whirled toward the door. His Army hat cocked over one eye and a cloud of smoke arising from his stubby pipe, Wildcat Gordon walked across the office. Except for a blue bruise under one orb, he did not seem to have fared too badly at the hands of The Whisperer.

"Gordon? You?" gasped Mayor Van Royston. "You were not abducted?"

"Sure I was," said Wildcat cheerfully. "By The Whisperer in person, for I heard his funny voice. But perhaps he judged I would be missing too much fun if he kept me for a pet. Anyway, when I woke up I was looking at the stars from a field out in the country."

Wildcat had only one colorless eye visible. It took in Jerry Boglund, whose face was convulsed with mixed surprise and anger.

"I just heard the phone conversation with Judge Kyley on an outside line," added Wildcat. "It seems the D.A. believes you might remember Slugger Simes and Tony Swano if you are put under oath. With Tommy, your closest friend, murdered and Mary Matthews still missing, you can hardly refuse your duty as a citizen."

Jerry Boglund grated out, "The D.A. could not make me remember what I did not see! He—"

"Then there's your fiancee, Theda Ross," cut in Wildcat suddenly. "If she is put under oath, a woman usually can have her emotions touched. She may forget the danger when she thinks of the fate of Tommy Jones and Mary Matthews. She looks like a swell girl, Boglund."

Jerry Boglund's face was harder than Wildcat had ever seen it.

"So you think I'd permit Theda to risk her life to help you out, after you really became responsible for the terrible murder of Tommy?" he grated. "These mob rackets are the business of the police! I refuse to put up my fiancee's life as a stake against conviction of a pair of rats! It isn't at all worth it! And, anyway, Theda was taken seriously ill from shock this afternoon and has been ordered to a hospital under a physician's order that she must not be disturbed! Her own life is at stake!"

There was a sudden glinting light in Wildcat's Texas eyes. He risked a long shot on a bet with himself it might the mark.

"Yes, I know," he said quietly. "She is in Hillside Sanitarium, and I heard through a Doctor Revers, an intern, that she had become delirious and late today her condition became critical. The D.A. might think it a good idea to have a stenographer and a notary on hand, just in case—"

Jerry Boglund's face had become a drawn, white mask.

"Why, damn you, Gordon!" he bawled, rearing to his feet. It seemed for a minute as if the clubman might take another chance at an encounter with Wildcat, but he turned abruptly toward the door. "Theda," he was muttering. "If anything happens to her—"

Mayor Van Royston's face changed shades from purple to gray, and back again.

"Gordon, you are the most inhuman devil that ever lived," he exploded. "I don't even believe you are telling the truth! It is—"

"Perhaps I wasn't," said Wildcat cheerfully. "In fact, your honor, I did not know until one minute ago that Theda Ross was in any hospital, much less the bloody Hillside Sanitarium."

Wildcat could add up two and two and get a result as fast as the cool Doctor Stanwyck. An amazing thought had burst upon him: Could Theda Ross be the woman to whom Doctor Stanwyck had referred as faking an illness? Then Jerry Boglund must be the man Doctor Stanwyck was engaging The Whisperer to place in his hands!

Mysterious as his reasons might be for having designs upon Jerry Boglund, Wildcat had no intention of placing the clubman in Doctor Stanwyck's hands or at his mercy. The whole pattern of the murders had perhaps changed in Wildcat's deductive brain.

Possibly he was thinking that Jerry Boglund, having been the closest friend of Tommy Jones, might be big enough to throw a monkey wrench into the legal machinery giving the Hillside Sanitarium a bequest of millions.

Though the missing Doctor Dean and Doctor Revers were undoubtedly would-be, if not actual, killers, the cold, reasoning brain of Doctor Stanwyck himself was something to think about.

Wildcat arose abruptly from the chair out of which Deputy Bolton had been ousted.

"You can resume my chair, Henry," he suggested. "But look out that it doesn't burn a hole in your trousers, and don't leave too many tacks in it for me to sit on."

"But The Whisperer, Gordon?" wheezed Mayor Van Royston. "He is the man behind all these crimes. I'm sure of it! Henry will have all the men search—"

"I'm the one who was socked on the head by The Whisperer!" gritted Wildcat. "He happens to be my special business this minute! Henry, if you're smart, you'll throw all the boys you can spare around Judge Kyley's court in the morning! I may see you there, and I may not!"

Wildcat strode from the room. He was hardly on the street before Mayor Van Royston was letting the newspaper reporters in. A new sensation was handed the press. Wildcat Gordon was free, and he had visited headquarters and disappeared again!

AS Wildcat's coupé left headquarters, he was working a swift transformation. It was The Whisperer at the wheel as the little car glided into a side street a short distance below where the lights of the Hillside Sanitarium showed. He was in position to see the entrance to the visitors' driveway, and he was sure his own expert driving had placed him on the hill ahead of Jerry Boglund.

The Whisperer had but a minute or two of waiting until a red, open sports car came roaring up the hill. The street here was deserted. Tall old oak trees cast a variable shadow because of the widely spaced street lamps.

Jerry Boglund was alone in his car. He was bending over the wheel. The Whisperer emitted a ghostly chuckle. His quickly faked story of the critical illness of Theda Ross might be giving the young clubman a bad half hour, but it might be the means of saving his life.

The red sports car slowed to make a curve just below the hospital driveway. Jerry Boglund twisted the wheel too late to avoid a coupé that drifted from a side street without lights and jammed its bumper squarely into one of his front fenders.

"Look out, you crazy nitwit!" yelled Boglund, braking down and springing from his seat as the cars locked. "That kind of driving will get you—"

But the other driver was out of his seat and had his back turned to the raging Boglund, as if he were inspecting the damage. All that Boglund saw was a smallish man dressed in gray clothes whose whitish hair marked him as a man well along in age.

"I'll teach you—"

Jerry Boglund had one fist clenched, but he never used it. The gray figure turned with the lightness and speed of a striking ghost. The padded sapper in one hand was laid expertly across Boglund's head, over one ear. The clubman pitched forward, would have plowed his face into the concrete, but a pair of strong arms caught him.

Boglund's car was run off into a vacant lot at one side when The Whisperer's coupé hummed back down toward the city. There was only one man in the driver's seat, but the rumble seat of the little car was partly opened to admit air.

Jerry Boglund was tightly bound. He was to wake up in one of the tenement hideouts maintained by The Whisperer. He was to discover himself bound with unbreakable knots, with his mouth and eyes taped shut.

SCARCELY half an hour had elapsed after Jerry Boglund had hurried from Wildcat Gordon's office at headquarters before one more kidnapping in the strange series of crimes that had begun with the hospital explosion had been accomplished. The grim, gray-faced Whisperer emerged from a tenement alleyway and went into a cigar store phone booth.

The number called by his weird voice was GA7-6166, the blind number he had been given by Doctor Stanwyck. The surgeon's cold voice replied.

"Your friend," were the eerie words going over the wire. "The name of the man you want, Doctor Stanwyck?"

"You know all that has happened, Whisperer?" asked the surgeon. "You have read that Jersey Joe is dead, that Morton Longus was taken from our morgue?"

"I read the headlines," spoke the whisper. "The name of the man with whom we are to do business?"

"It will be most difficult and dangerous, Whisperer. He is a man of high position. Our old disagreement is strictly personal, and we will not go into that. I want you to bring me Jerry Boglund."

"It is a big order and worth the price," said The Whisperer. "You shall have him, but you must come to meet him at an address I will now give you."

"Agreed," replied Doctor Stanwyck instantly. "I would not want him here. But if there is any trick, it will be—"

"That goes two ways, Doctor Stanwyck, so we understand each other," interrupted the chilling whisper.

The telephone was replaced. The Whisperer left the cigar store and glided back toward the tenement hideout in Lake Street. He would have given a great deal to have talked with Tiny Traeger again, but he dared not risk a call.

He hoped Tiny was keeping a close watch upon the movements of Doctor Stanwyck.

CHAPTER XIII
BLOOD ON HIS HANDS

SHORTLY after the telephone conversation between The Whisperer and Doctor Stanwyck, a doll-like, blue-eyed nurse was missing from the private wards she was attending on the third floor of the Hillside Sanitarium. The worried floor supervisor checked her off and put another girl in her place.

"If this keeps up, I'll be walking out on the job myself," murmured the supervisor grimly. "That's the fourth girl who has quit tonight. That little one did not look strong enough to take it, anyway. I hope she gets home all right."

The supervisor would have been amazed if she had known that the "little one" might have a cute, rounded chin, but it could take it equal to the toughest jaw in the big town. For Tiny Traeger had not departed from the hospital through any fear.

Truthfully, Tiny was having the time of her life. For were there not murders, stolen corpses, mobsters, doctors who might be villains, and villains who might be doctors, filling the brief hours of her nursing job?

Tiny had a decidedly petite figure, and perfect. So petite that it fitted easily into a narrow space in the darkness between two tall steel cabinets. She had watched for more than an hour before she had been given opportunity to hide herself in Doctor Stanwyck's private office.

The tall cabinets stood in a shadowed corner. All there was visible of Tiny at this moment was a pair of glowing eyes, which she could close quickly if any occupant of the office happened to turn her way.

Doctor Stanwyck entered, but he went straight to his desk. With Doctor Dean and Doctor Revers missing, the chief surgeon seemed to have no fear of another possible attempt at assassination. Perhaps the ice water in his veins chilled fear at any time.

The surgeon turned from his desk, Walked to the door and made sure it was locked. Tiny could hear him speaking to himself.

"Twenty millions! And only one man standing between me and—"

Doctor Stanwyck ceased speaking as he opened his big safe. The light illuminated the dial. Tiny was near enough to check every turn, the number it reached. She filed the figures away in her brain as the door swung open.

The surgeon removed only a little red book. He stood where he was as he penned a few words and grunted with satisfaction. The safe door swung shut and the handle whirled the bolts.

Doctor Stanwyck seemed to be in some haste. He paused an instant, listening, then walked over to a wall. He touched a picture and a panel slid back. There was a second safe. Its metal was of a grayish color—the color of lead. The composition was, in fact, lead.

The surgeon took out a short round tube. This, too, was of thick lead. He took what appeared to be an extra leaden wrapped from one pocket and enclosed the tube, thrusting it into an inner pocket.

Tiny heard him say, "Threaten me, will they? Outsmart me? We will see about that! Now if The Whisperer doesn't fail me! Well, I'll take care of him—yes—I'll take care of him. No loose threads now—"

The buzz of a hidden phone broke into the sinister soliloquy. Doctor Stanwyck touched a button and a phone instrument slid from under his desk top. "Yes?" he said.

"Quick work, Whisperer," he added. "But if this happens to be a double-cross, you'll—"

There was a pause, and then: "I just wanted to make sure. All right—the address?"

The surgeon repeated, "1515 Lake Street. You'll be waiting?"

The phone slid from view. The surgeon produced a small automatic from his desk, pocketed it, swept his office with searching black eyes. Then he pulled a light coat from a hanger and went out. Tiny heard the door lock snap.

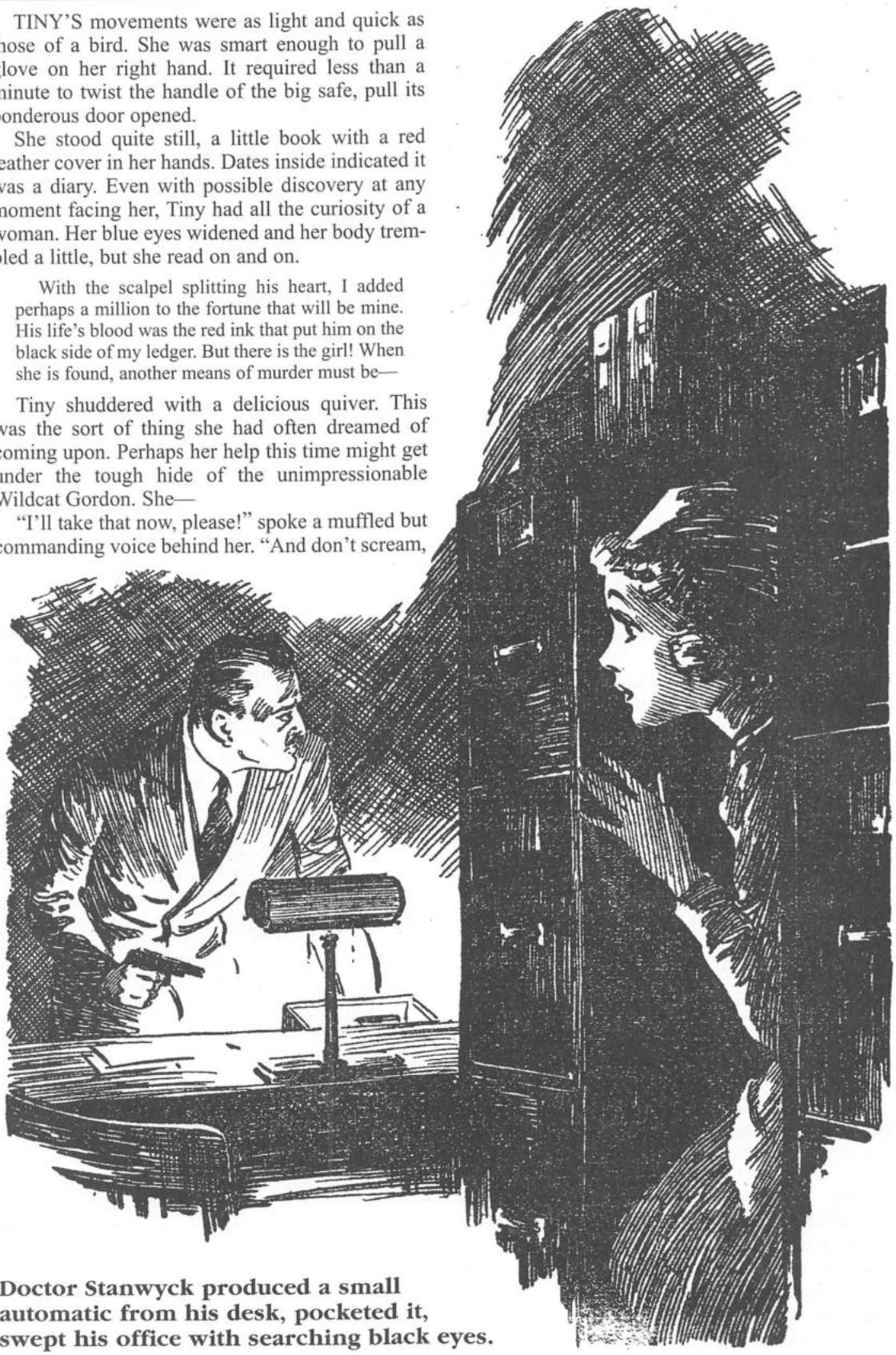
TINY'S movements were as light and quick as those of a bird. She was smart enough to pull a glove on her right hand. It required less than a minute to twist the handle of the big safe, pull its ponderous door opened.

She stood quite still, a little book with a red leather cover in her hands. Dates inside indicated it was a diary. Even with possible discovery at any moment facing her, Tiny had all the curiosity of a woman. Her blue eyes widened and her body trembled a little, but she read on and on.

> With the scalpel splitting his heart, I added perhaps a million to the fortune that will be mine. His life's blood was the red ink that put him on the black side of my ledger. But there is the girl! When she is found, another means of murder must be—

Tiny shuddered with a delicious quiver. This was the sort of thing she had often dreamed of coming upon. Perhaps her help this time might get under the tough hide of the unimpressionable Wildcat Gordon. She—

"I'll take that now, please!" spoke a muffled but commanding voice behind her. "And don't scream,



Doctor Stanwyck produced a small automatic from his desk, pocketed it, swept his office with searching black eyes.

or I'll strangle you cold!"

Tiny had difficulty repressing a cry. For when she turned she was looking at a woman without a face. Rather, there were layers of bandages over a face that must have been pretty. Tiny, startled as she was, still was woman enough to judge that the exposed perfect legs she saw must be owned by a woman who could have only an attractive face.

And the curving legs below the hospital nightgown was all that she really saw of the woman. For with her words, the intruder was coming forward, hands with scarlet fingernails shaped into claws, and a further menacing hiss of words coming from the swathed bandages.

The woman undoubtedly was a hospital patient. Perhaps she was mad, but her words indicated she knew exactly why she was there. The door to another office stood open. The name of Doctor Dean was on that door.

Tiny was quick enough to see all this, even as she was thrusting the red book into her bosom and starting to move to one side. Then the woman without a face sprang directly upon her.

The clawed hands darted toward Tiny's white throat, gripped her with a strength that cut off her breath. This all happened so quickly that the surprise of her attacker's appearance was still upon her. But the sudden shock left her now.

Pain from the clawing nails tearing her throat brought a little cry from the doll-like girl. The other woman seemed to be twice her weight and size. But that other woman's sudden loosening of a hand to tear at the bosom of her white uniform where she had thrust the little red diary was like sticking a pin into a sleeping wild animal.

"You will, will you?" panted Tiny.

She lived up then to some of the tricks old Quick Trigger had taught his precious granddaughter. Tiny's toe suddenly kicked out, driving into one bared, perfect shin of the other woman. Tiny did not make the mistake of striking at the heavily bandaged face. She now could see two glittering eyes in the white layers.

Then Tiny, as the woman was bent a little by her kick, punched her in the stomach with all the force she could put behind a small fist. The woman loosened her hands, gasping, falling back. But she sprang forward again with a muffled sob of pain and anger, putting all her weight into driving Tiny back into the steel safe.

Tiny saw a few stars, hissed a name at the woman, then her small hand went under her white, starched uniform. It came out with a blue pistol that certainly was not routine equipment for a nurse. The bandaged woman struck at her now with flying, flat hands, and the nurse's uniform tore away from the red book.

The diary fell to the floor. Tiny and the woman dived at the same moment. But as Tiny went down she let go with a swinging blow. That hand carried the pistol and its metal went *tunk!* on the woman's head.

"I'll—I'll have you killed for that—"

The woman was rolling over. Tiny heard footsteps coming rapidly toward Doctor Stanwyck's outer door. A nurse's voice said, "She must have come this way! We must find her before Doctor Stanwyck gets back! She choked Miss Carson, and ran out!"

Tiny guessed this must be the violent patient who had choked Miss Carson. She evened the score for the choked nurse with another *tunk!* of the pistol on the woman's bandaged head. The woman's eyes closed, and Tiny sprang toward a window that showed a fire escape outside.

Tiny was on the ground when nurses burst into Doctor Stanwyck's office. They cried out as they saw their missing patient lying before the open safe. Tiny had ruthlessly torn the nightgown from the beautiful figure. There were any number of oozing scratches.

So it happened that the robbery of Doctor Stanwyck's safe and a mysterious attack upon a woman patient at the Hillside Sanitarium became another morsel of the night's teeming news. One more headline of those that were fast driving Mayor Van Royston to madness.

The newspapers—and the mayor agreed—put the latest mystery crime on The Whisperer. Some reporter had convinced three nurses they had heard the whispering voice.

IN the meantime, The Whisperer had estimated it would require some time for Doctor Stanwyck to reach the address at 1515 Lake Street. He judged the surgeon would be smart enough to make a survey of the vicinity before he approached the tenement where Jerry Boglund lay bound in The Whisperer's hideout.

The Whisperer permitted more than half an hour to pass before he returned to the Lake Street block after phoning Doctor Stanwyck. He had a satisfied expression upon his pointed, gray face. If he felt any compunction in using Jerry Boglund, the young clubman, as bait to bring Doctor Stanwyck outside the hospital and into his hands, The Whisperer was not showing it.

There had been sinister eagerness in the surgeon's tone. He had been more than willing to come. The Whisperer could see where, with twenty millions at stake, Jerry Boglund or any other close friend of Tommy Jones might be a serious threat to the surgeon.

He judged he would have to be closely on his guard to prevent Jerry Boglund being hurt, after he

had discovered what might be behind Doctor Stanwyck's strange desire.

As he waited, The Whisperer thought of the missing Doctor Dean. He parked his coupé around the corner from 1515 Lake Street. Here was a gloomy, ill-lighted canyon of the slums district. The Whisperer walked toward a corner.

Suddenly he went toward a building wall, crouching, merging with the building. The fitful rays of a street lamp had shown him a face. He had missed seeing a long low car parked across the street. But now there was no mistaking the features he saw.

It was Doctor Dean, and his head was bare. The elusive doctor was at this minute straining forward, as though watching up the block. The Whisperer slipped into the street, fumbling a pistol from his clothes. If the wily assistant surgeon remained fixed in that pose he could take him from behind.

Then a girl screamed. A small, thin scream that was as quickly choked off. But the voice was undeniable, and all thought of Doctor Dean chilled from The Whisperer's mind. For the scream had been in Tiny's unmistakable voice!

The Whisperer went around the corner on light feet. He was just in time to see the girl, in her nurse's uniform, being lifted by a burly thug into a car. A closed car was standing at the curb, close to 1515 Lake Street. Other men were beyond the car. Tiny's writhing body was between The Whisperer and that of the mobster holding her.

The Whisperer ran forward, seeking a target for the pistol in his hand. Then a staccato rippling fire broke through the rear window of the car. The lead scraped the wall, chewed across the pavement just ahead. The Whisperer was forced to dive to one side, going over one of those low iron fences above a basement areaway.

He climbed to his feet, aiming the pistol. A taxicab went away fast from beyond the other car, and he judged that had been Tiny's means of reaching the place. He could not figure how she had so surely picked out the address, then he recalled his phone message to Doctor Stanwyck.

The closed car started away, and The Whisperer let go with deadly, hissing pistols. But again the chopper fire edged the iron fence and a stinging in his shoulder forced him to drop as death whistled into the wall above him.

The Whisperer's bullets failed to blast a tire of the gang car. Suddenly he became aware of two other cars. One had been parked farther up the block, and it was leading the car carrying Tiny. The other was long and low, and it whizzed past at high speed. As it went by, The Whisperer raised a pistol, but he did not fire when he saw a man's hand sticking up from the rear seat.

The hand was so stiffly held it might have been that of a dead man. The Whisperer thought of the missing Doctor Revers. Yet it seemed incredible that Doctor Dean would have the temerity, the bravado, to be hauling a corpse about the city in this exposed manner.

THE WHISPERER'S coupé was around in the side block. As the mob cars went around corners into other side streets, he swore at the impossibility of picking up the trail in time to accomplish the rescue of Tiny. But he got to the nearest public telephone, attempted to raise Sergeant Thorsen and failed. Then, in a disguised voice, he sounded a general alarm for the car he had seen close up, giving its number and description.

The Whisperer came from the phone, and he was sick. The possibility of finding a blind trail was slim. Several possibilities flashed into mind. He was as alert as a set trap when he again came into the block of 1515 Lake Street.

It would seem that Doctor Angus Dean might have been directing the thugs. Had he remained in hiding in or near Hillside Sanitarium and trailed Tiny Traeger?

Doctor Stanwyck? The cold-nerved surgeon could have attempted to outwit The Whisperer, double-cross him. Instead of being the proclaimed victim of a blackmailing mob, was Doctor Stanwyck actually cooperating with the crooks? If so, then he had used the address to send an armed force to Lake Street.

And where did Jerry Boglund fit in? The fact still remained that Jerry Boglund was a smart fellow, the friend of Tommy Jones, and likely to prove an upsetting factor in the easy acquisition of the Morton Longus millions by Hillside Sanitarium, or by Doctor Stanwyck as the undisputed controlling head of the institution.

The Whisperer reached the steps leading into the old tenement where he had placed Jerry Boglund. A fluttering bit of white drew him to the curb, it was an envelope, sealed and stamped. On it was inscribed:

> Whoever finds this please mail to Commissioner Wildcat Gordon, police headquarters, without delay.

"Tiny!" gritted the Whisperer, slitting the envelope. It contained a little book with red leather covers. He bounded up the stairs to the hideout before he paused to read.

Jerry Boglund was gone!

The door had been battered in. The dim light showed glistening red fluid on the floor. There was enough blood to have drained away a man's life. The Whisperer cursed Doctor Stanwyck. It would seem that he had kidnapped Jerry Boglund with the trapping of Doctor Stanwyck as his purpose, only

to have accomplished the murder of the clubman.

The Whisperer put the little red book under the light. His eyes devoured the first few pages.

"Hellamighty!" came his husky whisper. "A woman was murdered at Hillside Sanitarium two weeks before the explosion deaths! The extortion finger was on Doctor Stanwyck for that and now—"

He slipped the book into a pocket, glided into the darkness of a closet and listened intently. A car had stopped in the street below. It was some distance from the tenement. The Whisperer descended a ladder that led from a trapdoor in the floor of the closet.

Partway down was a concealed telephone. The Whisperer made a call on a long chance that Quick Trigger might now be back at the hideout where Tommy Jones and Mary Matthews were being held. And Quick Trigger replied in a low voice.

"No," he stated, "the mob has not discovered Tommy and Mary." Then he added: "I have been in touch with Sergeant Thorsen an' the boys suspended by Henry Bolton. They are stickin' for possible further word from you."

The Whisperer realized that alarming Quick Trigger about Tiny at this time would accomplish nothing. But he gave swift directions with respect to Sergeant Thorsen and his men. Then he added: "Tommy Jones has not seen you?"

"If he does," said Quick Trigger, "he will not recognize me. I am at this moment a bleary-eyed old rum soak dressed in rags. I have not gone into the other room, an' Brian Boru is still on the job."

"O.K.," said The Whisperer, "wait for Sergeant Thorsen. Judge Kyley's court at ten o'clock. We may split the town wide open."

THE WHISPERER was not so sure how the plotted break in Judge Kyley's court would result for himself, for Tiny Traeger. He went on down the ladder, into the alleyway, thinking, "The rats will identify Tiny and they will connect her with my other self, Wildcat Gordon. They will attempt to make her talk and—"

He tried to keep out of his mind the meat saw that had been intended to sever one of the fingers of Mary Matthews.

He might also have been thinking, "What will they do to Jerry Boglund if he is still alive?"

At this juncture, The Whisperer emerged into the street. The tall figure of Doctor Stanwyck was standing in the shadows close to 1515 Lake Street. The surgeon was peering upward at the windows. He was following The Whisperer's own instructions to remain outside until he heard The Whisperer's voice.

The Whisperer went over an iron fence, followed a basement areaway. Doctor Stanwyck heard no sound. No voice came. Instead, a pointed weapon suddenly prodded into his back. Then came the whisper like a wind whistling over sunken graves.

"Straight ahead and up those steps, Doctor Stanwyck! Do not turn or attempt to see me! Upstairs we will talk!"

"I do not care to see you, Whisperer," spoke the surgeon's steady voice.

"Straight ahead!" came the whisper. "Inside that door, Doctor Stanwyck!"

The weapon left the surgeon's back. It made a hollow-sounding impact on the back of his skull. The Whisperer's quick hands took a pistol and a wrapped leaden tube from the surgeon's pockets.

CHAPTER XIV
A MAN IN THE FENCE

WHEN Doctor Stanwyck opened his eyes he was sitting on the floor. The room was lighted, but the illumination was directly in the surgeon's eyes, and he could not see beyond the light. He rubbed a hand across his doubt-aching forehead.

"You have tricked me, Whisperer," he said with low bitterness. "I should have known what a crook of your caliber would do. Well, what is it? Where is Jerry Boglund, or did you intend to bring him? How much more? I am accustomed to it."

The eerie, cold whisper drifted through the room.

"Yes, you are accustomed to it, Doctor Stanwyck. There was a woman whose face you marred in your craze for new results from plastic surgery. She had a bad heart and you gave her an overdose of stimulant. Another of your staff discovered it. You had long plotted to get the Morton Longus millions. But you found yourself under the finger of another ruthless criminal."

The surgeon's face turned to gray chalk, but his voice was as steady as ever.

"You speak as if you had this from those who have attempted to ruin me," he stated. "Why should I deny the truth? But you will never find out more than that, and—"

"It is all in your little red book, Doctor Stanwyck," came the whisper from the darkness. "There are many other things in the little book, and the last notation was made tonight, just before you locked the book in your safe. I can read you that notation. Now are you ready to talk, and leave out nothing?"

For the first time Doctor Stanwyck broke, and his hands trembled.

"My diary?" he gulped. "How could you—"

"You wrote tonight, 'I am going after The Whisperer. If I succeed, it will be easy to convince the police these others are lying. It will be—'"

"Stop!" exclaimed the surgeon. "I do not know how you did it, but you are more clever than I thought, Whisperer! But now you know all you will ever find out, for I will not talk and I will not live—"

His hand moved so quickly that The Whisperer failed to prevent a tablet snapping from his sleeve and being swallowed. The surgeon's eyes held a cold, triumphant smile as The Whisperer darted across the room, bent over him.

"In one minute I will be out cold, and you couldn't even torture me into telling more than you know," said the surgeon slowly. "It will get you nothing to turn me over to the police. You don't dare do that, and I will go out—out —"

His eyes closed. But The Whisperer touched the man's lips, bent close to catch his breath. A ghostly chuckle came into The Whisperer's voice. In a minute he had a hypodermic needle filled. It came from a medicine cabinet in the room.

"There is an antidote for everything, my dear doctor," he murmured huskily. "And I think you will talk. Yes, you will scream out the truth where many will hear you."

He injected the hypodermic, picked up the surgeon's limp body and went down the back stairs of the tenement toward the alley.

JUST before five o'clock in the morning, Press Square was deserted. Two patrolmen were sheltered from a light rain in the entrance to a subway. They heard a small car come into the square on the other side and stop. But it moved on again very quickly, and they judged it was a newspaper car. The sun lifted in the gray sky over Press Square.

The scream of a woman worker on her way to an early job snapped the two coppers to attention. They heard other voices, men shouting. One man swore loudly and said, "Keep away, everybody! Don't you see the sign?"

A man was sitting behind the iron fence of the park in Press Square. His face stuck through between cold pickets in the rain. He did not move, for his arms were thrust through other openings and tightly handcuffed around the irons on the outside.

A black-lettered sign was over the man's head:

KEEP AWAY! DANGER!!
THIS MAN IS DYING OF THE PLAGUE!

The bruised and purple face of Doctor Arthur Stanwyck looked as if the sign might be true. A small slip of paper was fastened to the surgeon's sleeve, where his opening eyes could not miss reading it.

It seemed as if the woman's scream brought the surgeon fully to consciousness. The paper fluttered and he read:

> Your precious murder gram of radium is open in the lead tube over your heart. You know what happened to Morton Longus when that same tube was placed deep in the wound over his heart. Perhaps Doctor Dean did that. By this time, you are so deeply burned you cannot live. You may desire to ease your conscience before you die. If so, talk.

A crowd was gathering. But like all gullible city crowds, its members believed in signs. None ventured too close. Doctor Stanwyck stared at the wavering faces. He could hear a police whistle and men coming.

Then perhaps Doctor Stanwyck imagined he could feel the burning of the radium. At a moment like this he may have forgotten that the burn of radium is almost painless. Perhaps he had never been too sure of that. And there was a stinging burn, a weight of a lead tube fastened inside his shirt. But it was a melting gelatin capsule that caused the stinging.

The two coppers were pushing through.

"Well, I'll be damned! Get back, alla you! Wait a minute, Pat! Maybe so the sign's tellin' the truth! You be after callin' an ambulance and a doctor!"

Irish policemen are as quick to believe in signs as other persons. This was something for a medical examiner. The victim was sitting like a man might have sat in the public stock of early days. He could not escape to spread this plague, whatever it might be.

Doctor Stanwyck was straining uselessly at the handcuffs. He suddenly lost all his cold nerve, and cried out wildly:

"Help me, you fools! Don't you see I am burning to death?"

That clinched the crowd's belief in signs. The man must be the victim of a plague, raving in a delirium. For all could see he was not burning to death.

The surgeon's voice screamed more crazily.

"The radium—it is killing me—you fools!"

THE crowd moved cautiously back. Then it was that a police squad car rolled into the square, coming fast. When it stopped, the well-known figure of Wildcat Gordon himself headed a few coppers. They were of the Sergeant Thorsen squad of suspended policemen.

The crowd did not know that. Those there remembered only the slurring stories that had told how Wildcat Gordon had taken Tommy Jones to his death. Of Wildcat Gordon's yellow streak when he had taken a police car and apparently had thought only of himself.

Boos and hisses started. Wildcat's rough hands overturned several citizens before he stood in front of the man in the iron fence.

"Hellamighty!" rapped out Wildcat. "And what's all this, Doctor Stanwyck?"

Another police car skidded to a stop. Out of it jumped Deputy Henry Bolton and some of his men. The deputy pushed through and saw Wildcat.

"I'm burning to death—get me out of here—"

Doctor Stanwyck's speech became maudlin with fear. But Wildcat widened his feet and stood looking down at the surgeon.

"Who murdered Morton Longus?" demanded Wildcat suddenly.

"I'll tell it!" screamed Doctor Stanwyck. "I did it! I burned him to death with radium! Now get me out—"

"Who got Tommy Jones?" demanded Wildcat coldly, inexorably. "Where is Mary Matthews, and what have your mob friends done with the other girl?"

Doctor Stanwyck fought the handcuffs, blood beginning to run from his nose. "Turn me loose quickly!" he cried out. "The radium is burning me—I'll talk—The Whisperer put me here—Doctor Dean, he is the one who—"

Crack! sounded the explosion of a pistol back in the pushing crowd.

Wildcat Gordon pivoted. Deputy Bolton stared, turned. The screaming mouth of Doctor Stanwyck was stopped by the smash of a bullet that struck the upper jaw and ripped a death road through the surgeon's brain.

Wildcat knocked over two men as he sprang toward a floating wisp of blue smoke. Deputy Bolton shouted oaths and loomed behind him.

BUT the man who had fired that shot must have drifted away faster than the smoke of his weapon. Women and men were crying out, pushing away. More than a dozen gave no absolutely accurate description of the killer, as they had seen him. And no two agreed in any particular.

Deputy Bolton confronted Wildcat Gordon with rage narrowing his eyes and rounding his small mouth.

"You'll have a lot to explain, Gordon!" he jerked out. "This is The Whisperer's work again! I told Mayor Van Royston that Doctor Dean was the killer at the hospital, an' you freed him! He silenced Doctor Stanwyck before he had a chance to confess everythin'! Doctor Dean has been workin' with The Whisperer!"

"You think so fast, in so many different directions, Henry," stated Wildcat mildly, "it is difficult to follow you."

"Difficult to follow me?" yelled Deputy Bolton. "An' if anybody tried to follow you—here's this mob case comin' up in Judge Kyley's court this mornin'! The D.A. was puttin' Jerry Boglund on the stand! Now Jerry Boglund is gone, too! I've got men searchin' the roads outside! Maybe he's another one we'll find like Tommy Jones in a burned mob car! You've got a lot—"

The crowd was muttering ominously. Wildcat could see that Deputy Bolton was making a grandstand play to the crowd. It was a tough spot. That is, it was difficult for Wildcat to restrain itching knuckles. But he had his own reasons for permitting the situation to remain publicly as it was.

Wildcat pushed away. Then old Quick Trigger, in the guise of a drunken man, was beside him, catching his arm.

"Where's Tiny? Great grief, Wildcat, what's become of Tiny?"

"I'd give the commissioner's job, my life itself, to know that," muttered Wildcat. "Quick Trigger, we have to carry through as we planned, without knowing where she is."

CHAPTER XV
DEATH STALKS IN COURT

AT this moment, Wildcat Gordon was not too sure that Deputy Bolton had been wrong when he had said that Doctor Dean had silenced Doctor Stanwyck. For with the death of Jersey Joe Vanello, it might have been expected that his mob would have been broken up, lacking a leader.

Yet the seizing of Jerry Boglund, the abduction of Tiny Traeger, had spelled a brain still at the head of the Jersey Joe outfit. And Doctor Dean had been there when Tiny was seized.

Who could have been closer to the crimes of Doctor Stanwyck than his assistant surgeon? Perhaps Doctor Dean had seen a great opportunity to cut in on the Morton Longus millions to be left to the Hillside Sanitarium. He could have had extortion pressure exerted through Jersey Joe, at first attempting to keep himself clear of complications.

But then he had attempted to murder Doctor Stanwyck in his office. That could not be forgotten. And where did the missing Doctor Revers, the intern, fit into all this?

Other knowledge was possessed by Wildcat, but the Doctor Dean angle was but one of several illogical points—one of many headaches.

Wildcat Gordon did not go to headquarters this morning. He left it to Deputy Bolton to peddle his own story. From the headlines in new morning extras, it was evident that Deputy Bolton had not helped Wildcat's status with the public:

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON ACTS!

That was one headline. Under it was the story that Mayor Van Royston announced confirmation of Deputy Bolton's appointment as commissioner until later in the day. Then, the story ran, the party committee would sustain the mayor's action.

Members of the committee were quoted as backing up this news. Wildcat consumed a slow breakfast in a corner cafe and read the story. His colorless eyes, though, did not seem to see the words. Wildcat had the dull, weighted feeling that no coup

in the break of the case at the last moment would afford him any satisfaction.

Where was Tiny Traeger?

That was his persisting thought. The police had gotten nowhere. Some of his dependables—Sergeant Thorsen's suspended coppers—had found no trace of the missing girl. Wildcat wanted more than anything else to forget the case coming up in Judge Kyley's court, all the hospital killings, everything, so that he might be free to start a search of his own.

Even in that he did not know where to begin, unless he could put his hands upon one man. And that man might be dead!

NOTHING further happened in the breathless city when the hour of ten o'clock arrived, and Judge Patrick Kyley's court building was besieged by a clamoring crowd. A pushing mob, held out by tight police lines established by Deputy Bolton, was not there to see two mobsters held or freed.

They were there to be in on what was now being published as a case that would end the career of the hard-fisted, devil-may-care Wildcat Gordon.

Inside the building, Judge Kyley's court was packed. Coppers subjected everyone to a thorough search for weapons. Wildcat Gordon had not appeared. The rotund Judge Kyley wore a worried expression. His blue eyes were hard as he looked at smiling, suave Attorney Jackson.

The judge did not attempt to conceal his dislike for the criminal lawyer, one of the shysters who made his profits from mob pockets at the expense of society.

At this moment, Judge Patrick Kyley's expression was resigned. He had the air of thinking, "Well, we'll get it over with."

When court was convened, Attorney Jackson was instantly on his feet. His tone was light, and his slick smile mocked the court.

"In the light of information I have received," he said smoothly, "I move for a dismissal of my clients, Mr. Simes and Mr. Swano."

Slugger Simes and Tony Swano slanted their mouths in grins and looked at the court with all the contempt they dared show. Who was there to testify, to point them out as the rats they were, to tell how they had participated in murder and robbery? They were on their way out, their way back to continue their killing and their defiance of society.

Judge Kyley wiped perspiration from his red face. He saw Mayor Van Royston enter the room, and with him were members of the committee who were to complete the ousting of his friend, Wildcat Gordon. The judge could see but little hope.

Attorney Jackson said, "Your honor, if you please, I have made a motion. If necessary, I can put Deputy Commissioner Bolton on the stand."

"Well, let's hear what Deputy Commissioner Bolton has to say!" snapped Judge Kyley.

He was watching the door. Had Wildcat Gordon absented himself purposely—was the judge's thought. Deputy Bolton drew a long face as he came up to the stand.

"There is nothin' much for me to say," he offered, looking at a worried assistant from the D.A.'s office. Or perhaps it only appeared that the assistant D. A. was worried. "My police have no evidence to present. By the death of Tommy Jones—"

Low mutterings came from the spectators, and Judge Kyley rapped his gavel sternly.

"An' the disappearance of one Jerry Boglund, the police can present no one who might identify the defendants," went on Deputy Bolton.

Judge Kyley nodded gloomily. The assistant D. A. kept his eyes upon the table at which he was sitting. Deputy Bolton was having a field day of his own. He felt he was surely writing the final chapter in the career of Wildcat Gordon, the first chapter into his own accession to the commissioner's job he had so long coveted. He made a play.

"We've had a strange series of crimes," he went on. "It would seem that a man freed by Commissioner Gordon, a Doctor Angus Dean, has been workin' with the notorious scourge of the city, The Whisperer. It is due to the shrewd deduction of Mayor Van Royston himself that I have arrived at this conclusion."

Deputy Bolton's eyes went to the mayor. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, was written in the deputy's face.

"Commissioner Gordon unfortunately permitted Doctor Dean to go free," said Deputy Bolton, and the crowd murmured angrily. "Tommy Jones was seized an' killed, an' the police stand helpless before the court—"

Bang! went Judge Kyley's gavel.

"I believe the explanation has been adequate!" rapped the judge. "Mr. District Attorney, what have you to offer?"

The young assistant D.A. arose slowly to his feet. Attorney Jackson looked at him scornfully.

"The State will call Tommy Jones to the witness stand," said the assistant D.A. quietly.

THE words fell like a thunderbolt. The breath of the muttering crowd caught and held in a deathlike hush. They saw a side door open. Through this came blond Tommy Jones, white-faced, but with gray eyes as hard as steel.

Beside Tommy walked Mary Matthews. Close behind them came Wildcat Gordon, his red necktie as flaming as ever, his carnation fresh and crisp, his colorless eyes looking straight ahead. Sergeant Thorsen walked beside him.

"But—but—" Attorney Jackson was stammering. "This is—"

"Sit down!" thundered Judge Kyley.

"Tommy Jones will take the witness stand! Step down, Deputy Bolton!"

Back in the audience, Mayor Van Royston was sitting open-mouthed. The beginning of a ripple over the spectators was silenced by the judge's gavel. As if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, the assistant D.A. spoke.

"You are Tommy Jones. You will stand and be sworn."

The lips of Slugger Simes and Tony Swano were writhing. Fear leaped into their pale eyes. Attorney Jackson sagged into his chair.

Tommy Jones stood up, and his right hand was raised. He was dressed in an ill-fitting suit that belonged to Wildcat himself. It was of a violently checkered pattern.

A minute later Tommy Jones was replying to a question.

"I would know these two men anywhere," he said. "I could never forget their faces. They—"

Everyone was leaning forward tensely. The shot that came was hardly more than a spiteful crack that caused all eyes to jerk wildly about, all seeking the source of it.

Tommy Jones swayed, extended one hand as though reaching for some support that was not there. Mary Matthews screamed, Tommy Jones went down as a little red furrow showed between his eyes.

Wildcat Gordon was on his feet. His eyes were fixed upon a ventilator in the ceiling above Judge Kyley's desk. Pistol smoke lingered there. Wildcat slammed through the gate of the court rail.

Then it was that Slugger Simes and Tony Swano made a very foolish move. Wildcat's rush along the aisle broke the silence, started the packed courtroom into a panicky, milling movement as scores attempted to get from their seats.

Simes and Swano left their places beside Attorney Jackson and jumped for the low rail.

Spat! Spat!

Two clean shots were so closely spaced as to seem but one. A pistol in the hands of Sergeant Thorsen was held level. His wooden face showed no emotion whatever. But his voice cracked out.

"Anyone else making a move toward the door will get the same!"

Slugger Simes and Tony Swano hung limply over the low court rail. Blood trickled from over their right ears. They would have no further interest in the life or death of Tommy Jones. Society had been purged of them. They had beaten their last rap.

But Mary Matthews had Tommy's head in her lap. A bailiff was pouring cold water. Tommy opened his eyes and grinned faintly.

"Almost got me, Mary, but I'll be all right," he said.

CHAPTER XVI
THE KILLER OF KILLERS

THE court let out one roar that was wholly unrestrained by the thumping of Judge Kyley's gavel, and for once the usually choleric jurist was in sudden smiling humor.

Tommy Jones had arisen to his feet, a little shakily, but grinning. The bullet that had been intended to split his brain had done no more than raise a red welt on his forehead. His arms were around Mary Matthews.

At this moment the crowd was too noisy to hear the spiteful *crack!* in a room above the court. It might have been a dry stick snapping. Wildcat Gordon did not waste time using a key or tool on the lock of a door up there.

One hard shoulder cracked a panel of the door, snapped the lock!

He was in an unused room above Judge Kyley's court. His eyes snapped to a man with a pistol who had suddenly slumped forward on his face. There was no doubt but this man had been the would-be assassin of Tommy Jones.

Blood was gushing from the man's throat. Wildcat saw smoke lingering in an open window at the side of the room. Feet were pounding down a fire escape at the back of the building. Wildcat could see an empty alley, and he swore as he noted that Deputy Bolton had neglected to put police back here.

There were a dozen ways out of that alley into other buildings. The man who had just rubbed out the mobster who had shot Tommy Jones was dropping down the fire escape with agile movement.

Wildcat could hear his coppers following him into the upstairs room. He did not wait, but slid down the fire escape irons. The fleeing killer of a killer had hit in the alley, was perhaps a clean twenty feet below Wildcat. The killer jerked around, and slugs whined from a silenced weapon.

Lead sliced into Wildcat's ribs and parted his hair. A door into one of the buildings on the alley stood open. Then Wildcat let go of the fire escape and jumped. The other man attempted to dodge. But Wildcat landed squarely upon him, driving out his breath.

He turned the still conscious man over and his voice betrayed no surprise as he saw the killer's face. He snapped handcuffs on the man's wrists.

"So you always try to make sure that your own hired killers don't live to put the finger on you," Wildcat said. "The game's up. It's too bad for you that your sweet murder setup had to be all upset right at the beginning by such a trifle as broken glass. Come on!"

AT about this same moment, as Wildcat's coppers were streaming into the alley and he placed his prisoner in their hands for the time, a new commotion had arisen in Judge Kyley's courtroom.

A blue-eyed girl with a bruise on her chin and her curly black hair in wild disorder was coming from the outside door. A man walked close behind her, his square jaw set like a piece of granite.

Judge Patrick Kyley was standing, and he forgot all about his dignity.

"Glory be!" he shouted. "Little Tiny Traeger!"

The crowd gaped at the girl. Her torn dress revealed a lovely white shoulder. All voices hushed. Tiny paused at the court rail.

"Where is Wildcat Gordon?"

Her clear young voice rang out. And Wildcat himself, with blood dripping from one hand, stepped in through a side door. For once there was no hardness whatever in Wildcat's tone.

"Here, Tiny, here!" he cried out.

"Wildcat! Did you receive the little red book?" called out Tiny. "The murder diary of Doctor Arthur Stanwyck?"

It was as if two persons were speaking to each other in the silence of a wilderness. This was such entertainment as no courtroom crowd had ever before been given.

"I have it, Tiny!" stated Wildcat. "I thought you had paid for it with your life!"

Deputy Bolton had been like a frozen man for many minutes, ever since Tommy Jones had been called to the witness stand. But Henry Bolton was one of those individuals with a brain like a bulldog's teeth. He never let go of an idea.

"Doctor Dean!" he bawled out. "Look at him! Arrest him, boys! He is the man who killed Doctor Stanwyck this mornin'! It was the second time he tried it! He has been connected up with The Whisperer, connected with this killer mob!"

"I'll say Doctor Dean was connected with the mob!" shrilled Tiny, her blue eyes flashing upon Henry Bolton. "He connected with four of the mob! And they connected with him! Only he got a bullet in a shoulder, and the mobsters took them where a good connecter puts bullets! That's why I'm here! Doctor Dean rescued me when they were torturing me to find out what I knew!"

Into the amazed gasp of the crowd came Doctor Dean's calm, slow speech.

"That's right," he stated, but he did not stop there. "Deputy Bolton also is correct. I killed Doctor Stanwyck this morning, after I had trailed the mobsters and succeeded in saving this girl. I tried once before to kill Doctor Stanwyck, to try and save the Morton Longus millions to help the crippled children at the Hillside Sanitarium.

"Doctor Stanwyck murdered Rana Ransome and others with a gas explosion when he discovered he had ruined the woman's face in an operation. It was his second murder for the same reason. And because of that, a man who controlled a mob was using a Doctor Revers in the hospital to work an extortion racket. I had learned that Doctor Stanwyck had been forced to agree to divide the Longus fortune with the brain of this mob. Doctor Revers is also dead. Now you may arrest me. I have done what I could."

Wildcat Gordon had a hard grin across his broad mouth. He stood before Doctor Dean and Deputy Bolton.

"You are in my custody, Doctor Dean," he stated. "I still happen to be the police commissioner. You have cleared up one or two points for me. It is true, as you say, that an outsider and Doctor Stanwyck were after the Longus millions. And for that they had planned a neat series of murders, including the killing of Tommy Jones and possibly Mary Matthews. But I believe it may have been intended to save Mary Matthews, for the brain of Jersey Joe's mob was in love with Mary, and would have married her if his plans had worked out.

"Sergeant Thorsen, have the boys bring in Jerry Boglund!"

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON stood with fishy eyes in the midst of the party committee. He could only gulp, "Gordon is still crazy! Why, Jerry Boglund is a member of my North Shore Club! It is a mistake—"

But it did not appear so when a sadly disheveled Jerry Boglund stood before Judge Kyley. The faces of Tommy Jones and Mary Matthews held deepest bewilderment.

"Jerry?" groaned Tommy Jones. "He couldn't—why, he didn't even want me to risk identifying these members of the mob!"

"And he tried to rescue me before The Whisperer carried me away," said Mary softly.

"That's right!" snapped Wildcat. "Look at them, Jerry Boglund! Look at the man you made a friend in the North Shore Club in order to put him on the spot with your dirty mob!

"Tell him how you were a medical student. How you met Doctor Stanwyck and how a crooked friend, Doctor Revers, told you of knowing Doctor Stanwyck had murdered a woman. Go on from there, and tell him how your adventuress woman friend, Theda Ross, posed as your fiancee. How you worked it to have Tommy murdered because of his honesty, while all the time you posed as the friend who was trying to keep him from risking his life to identify a pair of thugs who you intended to have bumped off."

The courtroom crowd was tense now.

"Killer of killers, Jerry Boglund!" continued Wildcat. "You just murdered the mobster you sent to get Tommy Jones on the witness stand! You had Mary Matthews kidnapped, and it seems The Whisperer balled up your sweet plan to pose as her rescuer. Then you would have murdered her as quickly as any other person, unless you could have deluded her into marrying you.

"You were prepared to double-cross Doctor Arthur Stanwyck in a big way if Mary had finally consented, and the money never would have gone to the hospital. Either way, you stood to win. You had a few thousands when you came out of medical school, and you got more by putting the finger on good holdup prospects for Jersey Joe's mob. Jersey Joe owed you a lot.

"But even Jersey Joe had to go when he became dangerous to you. You had him hidden in the hospital, and your friend, Doctor Revers, used a scalpel to remove him from the picture. All the time you didn't know that two bits of glass had put the finger on you as surely as if some of your murdering rats had squawked!"

It was the second time Wildcat had mentioned two pieces of glass.

"Slugger Simes and Tony Swano have been removed, Jerry Boglund. It was intended they should be after they had served the purpose of baiting Tommy Jones to his death. I suspected that when I learned they had been on Jersey Joe's bad book."

Tiny Traeger was staring fixedly at Wildcat.

"A woman with a bandaged face tried to take Doctor Stanwyck's diary from me," said Tiny.

"Another count against Jerry Boglund," said Wildcat, "We have Theda Ross in custody. But Boglund sent her to Doctor Stanwyck with an order that she was to be removed. She was becoming troublesome. That was after the mob shot Morton Longus, and Doctor Stanwyck killed him with radium. I may say, the body of Morton Longus was mysteriously returned this morning to the hospital morgue."

Mayor Van Royston was purple. His indrawn chin was suddenly thrust out. Sometimes the mayor couldn't take it. He came striding toward Wildcat Gordon.

"Who—what—how could you know all these things?" demanded the mayor. "You were not around half the time. I demand someone specific piece of evidence! What is this about bits of glass?"

Wildcat flicked a finger over his bright carnation.

"Right, your honor; I'm not around half the time. You and my friend, Henry Bolton, break murder cases too fast for me. I have to go out for air sometimes. For example, you had Doctor Dean in jail and the hospital murders all cleaned up before I even got started."

A broad grin went over Judge Kyley's rubicund face.

"As for the bits of glass, your honor. Sergeant Thorson, have them brought in!"

THE two pieces of glass were like small pears. They looked as if they had come from an auto windshield. Wildcat took them between his fingers.

"You were finished before you started, Jerry Boglund, because you didn't see these," said Wildcat. "They were sticking in the front seat cushion exactly where you would have been sitting at the steering wheel when Mary Matthews was kidnapped, if the snatch had been as you told it.

"The glass came from a mob truck that was used to wreck the car. But you and Theda Ross were not in the car when it was smashed, or that glass would have gone through you. No, Boglund, you knocked Mary Matthews out, or Theda Ross did it. Then you were out of the car when the truck hit it. You were supposed to have been knocked out by the mob, but you were looking on when the crash came. Too bad, Boglund, you did not see where the glass fell."

Doctor Dean said, "I am in your hands, Wildcat Gordon. I cannot say that I regret trying to save the hospital's reputation, at least trying to keep the Doctor Stanwyck murders from becoming public. For I knew they would cause the Longus support, if not his millions, to be withdrawn; and the hospital has been doing good work for children."

Tiny put her hand on the doctor's arm. She said not to worry. Doctor Dean's dark blue eyes twinkled a little.

"When I am free," he said, "we shall have dinner together."

"That's a date, Doctor Dean," said Tiny, with a swift glance at Wildcat. "Perhaps you don't think I'm such a child."

Wildcat had a funny lump in his throat, but he did not know why.

"And now," came from the persistent Mayor Van Royston, "everything is just fine, Commissioner Gordon. But not one word of explanation has been given for this Whisperer!"

Wildcat pulled his Army hat over one eye.

"Sometimes I don't believe he ever will be explained, your honor," he said quietly.

Back in the courtroom a gray-haired, bearded man who looked much like a drunken bum rubbed his hands together and groaned.

"If I only hadn't made that danged dental plate!" he muttered.

THE END

FOUR-COLOR MAGIC by Anthony Tollin

After pounding out two Shadow novels each month for a half-dozen years, Walter B. Gibson in 1937 launched a second series for the new pulp magazine, *Crime Busters*—with a sleuth inspired by real-life stage magicians. "Norgil was modeled somewhat on an earlier Harry Blackstone, typical of the vaudeville acts," Gibson explained. "Miriam Laymond was a typical leading lady of the show."

Walter often traveled with the Blackstone show, serving as press agent and even performing the show when the magician was ill.

Like many other pulp heroes, Norgil moved onto four-color pages when Street & Smith launched its comic book line in 1940. Despite the success of its hero pulps, the publishing house deliberately showcased many of its lesser known pulp series in its comic book pages, especially those who strongly resembled successful comic strips. Iron Munro earned a prominent spot in *Shadow Comics* because the S&S promotions department believed John W. Campbell's science fiction hero possessed "the best features of *Superman* and *Buck Rogers*." It's easy to understand why the publishing house chose Norgil for adaptation, considering the popularity of Lee Falk's *Mandrake the Magician* newspaper strip.

THE BLUE PEARLS
by MAXWELL GRANT

Gibson teamed with cartoonist Vernon Greene to adapt "The Blue Pearls" (previously reprinted in *The Whisperer* Volume 3) as a comic book story in *Shadow Comics* #3. Norgil returned in *Doc Savage Comics* #1, 4 and 5, and in *Shadow Comics* #9.

Cartoonist Vernon Greene was born in Battle Ground, Washington and attended the University of Toledo before beginning his professional career in 1927, producing sports cartoons for the *Portland Telegram*. He moved to the *Toledo News-Bee* in 1929, and continued his career as a sports cartoonist at the *Toledo Blade* (1930-32) and the *New York Mirror* (1934-36). Greene assisted Chic Young on *Blondie* and ghosted *Polly and Her Pals* for Cliff Sterrett before teaming with Gibson on *The Shadow* comic book stories and newspaper strip. He served as an Army Air Corps medical photographer during World War II and succeeded creator George McManus on *Bringing Up Father* in 1954.

Curiously, Walter Gibson's first crime-busting magician never appeared in Street & Smith's second-longest-running comic series, *Super Magician Comics*, perhaps because Norgil shared too many similarities with the title's real-life star, Harry Blackstone.

Super Magician Comics ran for 56 issues, and spawned *Red Dragon* spinoff series and several subsequent Blackstone comics scripted by Gibson for Vital, EC Comics and Timely/Marvel. (A *Red Dragon* comic story by legendary pulp illustrator Edd Cartier will be reprinted this summer in *The Shadow* Volume 74.)

Walter Gibson's first Norgil comic book story also features instructions on how to perform three simple magic tricks, foreshadowing similar magic instructional departments in *Super Magician Comics* and his 1948-50 *Blackstone Magic Detective* MBS radio series. •

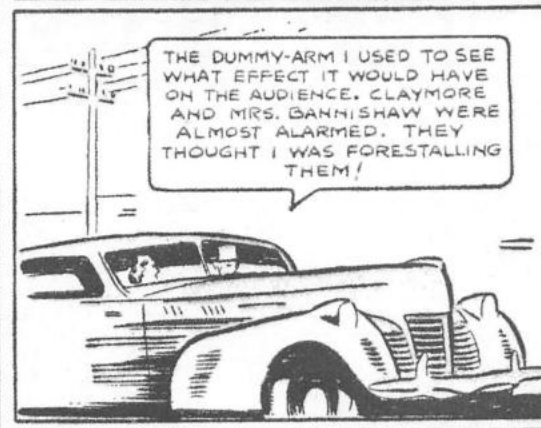
Walter B. Gibson (left) and cartoonist Vernon Greene (right) collaborated on the Norgil and Shadow features in *Shadow Comics* #3 (May 1940).

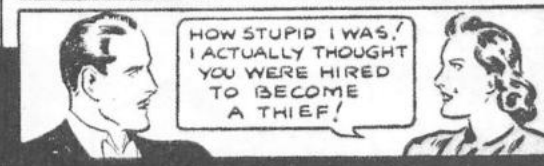
Norgil, and his pretty assistant, Miriam, are just about to leave for an engagement at wealthy Mrs. Bannishaw's, when Frenzel puts a proposition before the magician.

MY NECKLACE!
I'M SORRY, I THOUGHT MY PRECIOUS PEARLS HAD BEEN TAKEN!
I SAW IT. YOU WERE TRYING THE OLD PICK-POCKET'S GAG OF A DUMMY ARM. YOU WERE TRYING TO STEAL THAT NECKLACE!
PUT THIS ARM BACK IN MY CASE, AND IF I WANTED TO STEAL A NECKLACE, DO YOU THINK I'D DO IT IN FRONT OF SIXTY PEOPLE?
AS MIRIAM PUTS THE DUMMY ARM IN THE CASE, SHE HEARS SOMETHING IN THE ADJOINING ROOM.
CAUTIOUSLY OPENING THE DOOR, TO HER HORROR SHE SEES THE BODY OF BYRD ON THE FLOOR.
AS SHE STOOPS OVER THE BODY, SOUNDS COME FROM THE ROOM SHE HAS JUST LEFT.
YOU KILLED BYRD!
TAKING AN EMPTY REVOLVER FROM A COAT OF NORGIL'S, SHE FLINGS OPEN THE DOOR TO BE CONFRONTED BY FRENZEL.
FRENZEL MAKES A LUNGE AT MIRIAM BUT, ANTICIPATING HIS MOVE SHE CRASHES THE REVOLVER DOWN ON HIS HEAD.

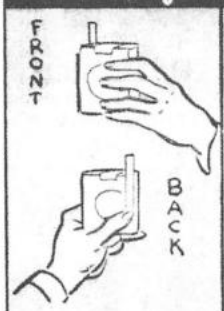
HOW TO THE GARDEN, WHERE WE CAN ALL MEET NORGIL AND COMPLIMENT HIM ON HIS WONDERFUL PERFORMANCE.
SHE'S FAINTED!
MY PEARLS! MY PEARLS ARE GONE!
DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY! AFTER HIM!
HELP! HELP!
CLAYMORE BREAKS THE WINDOW & THROWS SOMETHING OUT.
FROM THE FOLDS OF A BLUE HANDKERCHIEF IN NORGIL'S ROOM DROP FOUR PEARLS.

WHERE ARE THE REST OF THE PEARLS? WE CAN ONLY FIND FOUR OF THEM!
YOU WON'T FIND MY FINGER-PRINTS ON THAT KNIFE!
HE IS NOT ONLY A THIEF BUT A MURDERER! THERE IS A DEAD MAN IN THE OTHER ROOM AND I FOUND THIS KNIFE IN NORGIL'S CASE.
WHY SHOULD ANYONE WEAR GLOVES, WHEN HE INTENDED TO WIPE THE KNIFE ON A MAKEUP TOWEL?
BECAUSE YOU WERE WEARING GLOVES WHEN YOU KILLED BYRD!
THOSE FOUR PEARLS WERE MISSING FROM THE NECKLACE WHEN MRS. BANNISHAW WORE IT TONIGHT. YOU CAN CHECK IT FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT WERE TAKEN
WHAT ABOUT THE PEARLS THAT WERE FOUND IN YOUR ROOM?
I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND. SOMEONE SEIZED MRS. BANNISHAW'S PEARLS AND HEADED ACROSS THE HALL AFTER TURNING THE LIGHTS OUT. I WAS TRAPPED BUT DIDN'T HAVE THE PEARLS. THE FOUR PEARLS WERE PLACED IN MY ROOM TO TRAP ME.
SUPPOSE THAT I REGAINED THOSE PEARLS FROM A PLACE WHERE I COULDN'T POSSIBLY HAVE PLACED THEM. LET'S GO TO THE GARDEN.
TAKING A FISHING-LINE, NORGIL, ACCOMPANIED BY THE OTHERS, GOES TO THE GOLDFISH POND.
LUCK ON THE FIRST CAST. YOU WILL FIND NINETEEN MORE FISH WHO HAVE GOBBLED PEARLS.
THE SHOWER OF PEARLS CAME FROM THAT WINDOW THAT CLAYMORE BROKE!
STAND WHERE YOU ARE!



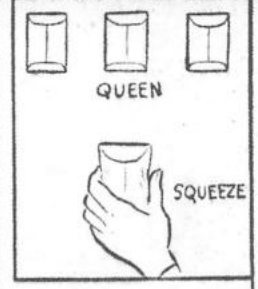


THREE TRICKS for YOU from NORGIL the MAGICIAN

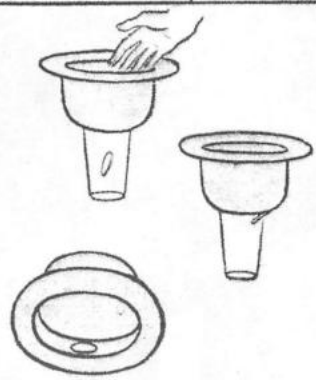


RISING CIGARETTE

A SIMPLE, BUT VERY EFFECTIVE TRICK. A CIGARETTE RISES OF ITS OWN ACCORD FROM A PACK.
THE CIGARETTE IS ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE PACK, AND THE THUMB PUSHES THE CIGARETTE UP.
IT LOOKS AS IF IT RISES FROM THE INSIDE OF THE PACK.



SEVERAL CARDS - ONE QUEEN - ARE SEALED IN SEPARATE ENVELOPES.
YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND THE QUEEN.
USE YOUR OWN CARDS AND ENVELOPES. FIRST TRIM SIDE EDGES OF THE QUEEN SO THE CARD IS SLIGHTLY NARROWED. NEXT USE ENVELOPES THAT OPEN AT THE END WHICH ARE THE WIDTH OF A PLAYING CARD. BY SQUEEZING THE SIDES OF EACH ENVELOPE YOU CAN EASILY TELL WHICH ONE HAS THE QUEEN.



COIN THROUGH HAT

A DERBY HAT INVERTED ON AN ORDINARY DRINKING TUMBLER, THE MAGICIAN DROPS HALF A DOLLAR INTO THE HAT. THE COIN GOES RIGHT THROUGH THE CROWN AND INTO THE GLASS. TWO COINS ARE USED, ONE RESTS ON THE EDGE OF THE GLASS HELD BY PRESSURE OF THE HAT-AND CONCEALED BECAUSE IT IS ON THE SIDE AWAY FROM VIEW. DROPPING THE COIN INTO THE HAT DISLODGES THE OTHER COIN WHICH FALLS INTO THE GLASS. PICK UP THE HAT AND SLOWLY TURN IT OVER, THE ORIGINAL COIN SLIDES OUT OF SIGHT, WITHIN THE INNER-BAND.

ANOTHER **NORGIL ADVENTURE** IN THE **NEXT ISSUE**

TIME HAS RUN OUT FOR CRIME!

Out of the foggy night steps The Whisperer! His super-silenced automatics spitting blue flame, he hurls a hissing challenge to the Law and lawless alike!

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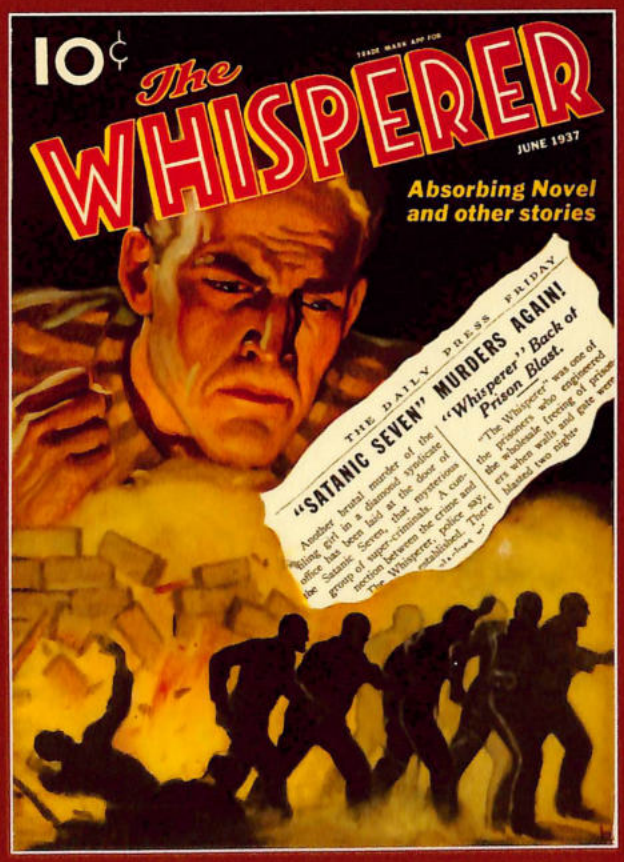
The Whisperer uncovers the horrific mystery behind *The Lost Face Murders.*

Plus the Golden Age comic book debut of



Wildcat Gordon follows a trail of wholesale murder that begins with a prison break and leads to *The Satanic Seven.*

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Clifford Goodrich

THE WHISPERER #6: "The Satanic Seven" & "The Lost Face Murders"

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